Short Stories.

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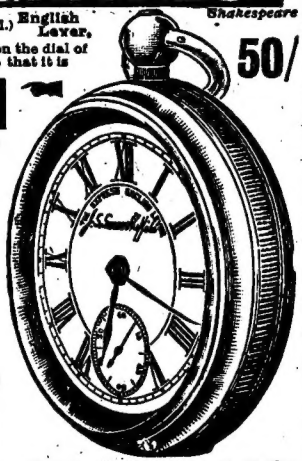

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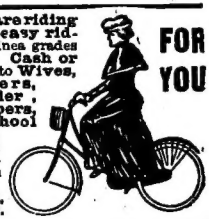

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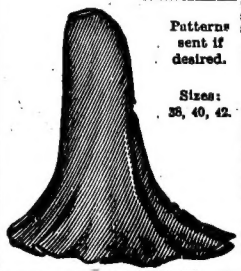

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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street London, W.C.

Short Stories

No. 714.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending September 6th, 1902.

The Mystery of Trebarven House.

"Help! help! help!" The cry rang out upon the still night air, and I reined up my horse sharply and listened intently. For hours I had been driving across what seemed in the darkness an almost interminable expanse of moor, and the silence of the night had been absolutely unbroken until that cry fell across it. The sound was blood-curdling, fearful, coming as it did upon the stillness and loneliness of the great moor, and I could not refrain from shuddering a little as I sat listening intently for what was to follow.

My horse pawed the ground impatiently; the sound of his hoofs upon the road seemed positively thunderous in the surrounding quietness that could almost be felt.

No glimmer of light showed from the sky, the day had been heavy and sultry, black clouds covered the heavens, and a storm brooded over the land. The air was breathlessly warm, and the moisture it contained made me realise that I could not be far from the sea, though for many miles I had been aware that I had lost my bearings, and was driving on in the vague hope of coming upon a human dwelling-place before the storm broke.

"Help!" The cry rang out again, and I strained my ears to catch the direction from which it came.

"Help!" Once more the word was borne to me, but more faintly, and coming from a little further to my left than I had at first thought.

The voice was that of a woman, and a woman evidently in great fear or danger, and, without a moment's delay, I scrambled from my dog-cart, tied my horse (as well as the darkness and my lamps would allow me) to the rough fence that bordered the road, and then dashed off in the direction from which the cry had proceeded.

Striking across the fence, I stumbled over the broken ground, my progress necessarily slow because of the holes and mounds, not to mention the clumps of gorse and tussocks of heather with which the moor abounded.

Presently there struck upon my ears a sound which made me pause in my headlong career. The muffled thunder of surf upon rocks far below brought me to a sudden standstill, and I confess that I was bathed in cold sweat from head to foot, as it flashed across me that I must have been rushing pell-mell towards the edge of a cliff.

This moorland, I knew, ran parallel to the sea, and to the awful black cliffs which made the coast a terror to mariners, but I had not realised until this moment how near the road went to the edge of the cliffs, and I stood for an instant in horror-stricken dismay, listening to the terrible booming of those unseen waves hundreds of feet beneath.

"Oh, help!"

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The voice seemed nearer to me—much nearer, and it appeared to come from that black gulf which, now that my eyes had grown more accustomed to the darkness, I saw yawning only a few yards ahead of me.

Could any human being possibly be there—over the cliff edge, in the yawning chasm which had the sea for its bottom? Could the cry really have come from those depths? I crept cautiously on; and, just as I was nearing the verge of the abyss, a flash of lightning illuminated earth and sky and sea.

Yes; and sea!

Far, far below, almost at my very feet, I could see the black water tossing and foaming over the blacker rocks, and fretting itself against the smooth, black cliff that went sheer, sheer down into the churning waves.

Beyond, stretched the wide expanse of ocean; above, was the stormy midnight sky; around me on every hand the dreary moorland; and on a tiny spar of rock, that jutted halfway down the precipice, I saw, in that moment's flash of light, a woman's form.

Throwing myself flat down upon the short grass on which I stood, I peered down into the blackness.

"Tell me what I can do to help you," I shouted. "I am a stranger, I do not know the country hereabouts; are you far down?"

In spite of the roar of the waves, my voice carried to that jutting rock, and a woman's voice replied:

"I cannot hold on much longer! I could reach a rope; I am not too far down for that."

A rope? I did not go for a driving tour carrying ropes with me, and on all that great moor I had not passed a human habitation since seven in the evening. An idea suddenly struck me.

"I will come back quickly!" I shouted down again. "Wait for me."

Then, I tore back over the moor, told aright by my horse's pawing hoofs, snatched my carriage rug from its place; by the light of the lamp knotted my coat to the rug, and was preparing to tear open my Gladstone and find other articles of clothing to lengthen the chain, when I heard the rumble of wheels, saw the gleaming of lights, and a second later a motor car was rushing by. I hailed its occupants loudly, almost screaming to them to stop, and they pulled up, with what struck me was evident reluctance.

"Come and help me!" I panted. "A woman has fallen over the cliff; there is not a moment to lose!"

"Woman over the cliff!" snarled a man's voice; whilst a feminine shriek chimed in, and a gruff bass exclaimed:

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"Well! we can't let a woman stay out on the cliffs, even though there is a storm coming on!"

The last voice was plainly that of the driver, and I heard the first speaker snap out:

"You're a fool, John!" Then the trio emerged from the darkness into the circle of light thrown by their lamps, and I saw a gentleman of perhaps forty-five years; a singularly handsome woman ten years or more his junior, and a man-servant—whose appearance I liked best of all.

"I've got a rope here!" he said, "come on, mister!" and, leaving the other two beside their snorting carriage, he and I ran across the moor, and this time I took the precaution of carrying with me one of my lamps.

At the edge of the cliff both the coachman and I lay flat down and peeped over the dizzy height, and I again called to the woman below.

Her answer was very faint, but her voice was quite audible, and the man beside me exclaimed in horror-stricken accents:

"Why, 'tis Miss Mamie! Good Lord deliver us!".

There was no time to ask who Miss Mamie might be; we dared not risk a second's delay, but immediately lowered the lamp and the rope together in the direction from which the cry for help had come. Around us all was black darkness; the only relief to it in the whole wide horizon, that speck of light travelling slowly, slowly down the side of the cliff.

Our end of the rope we attached to the bent, gnarled stump of a tree against which our feet had struck; and when, after what seemed long ages, a voice from the gulf below called: "Pull me up, now!" The coachman and I tugged at the rope for all we were worth.

Never had I experienced such moments of sick suspense as those that followed, before at last we lifted the form of the woman we had rescued over the edge of the cliff, and laid her on the grass at our feet.

She was young and very lovely; these two facts at once revealed themselves to me, as I lifted the carriage lamp and looked into her face.

Her eyes, though wide with terror, were of a wonderful blue; her hair that had come unbound, fell round her in rippling waves of gold; even the whiteness of her face could not detract from her great beauty.

"Why, Miss Mamie," my companion said, "whatever has happened?"

"Don't ask me," she moaned, "it was too awful! He—— But don't ask me!" and her eyes closed wearily.

Lifting her gently from the grass, my fellow-rescuer and I carried her as well as we could over the broken ground to the road, where the owner of the motor and the lady with him were in earnest conversation.

As we bore our burden into the light, both the man and woman uttered a cry of horror.

"Mamie!" they exclaimed simultaneously, and apparently in overwhelming amazement. "What can have happened? Mamie—*here?*"

I glanced at the face of the man as he spoke, and I could have sworn that a look of disappointed malice shot out of his eyes. Yet I assured myself the next moment that I must have been mistaken, for he came forward and wrung my hand warmly, saying:

"How can I ever thank you enough, sir? This girl you have saved from an awful death, is my wife's sister—her half-sister, to be correct. How could she have fallen over a cliff on such a night? How was she here at all? Whatever the explanation is, I thank you deeply, sir, for your help!"

"Yes, indeed," put in the lady eagerly; "we cannot be grateful enough to you—Mr.——"

She paused, and I said:

"My name is Renshaw—Brian Renshaw."

"Then, Mr. Renshaw, you must come home with us at once, and allow us to offer you what hospitality we can," she cried.

Was it fancy, or did a look of annoyance, even of anger, cross her husband's face? I could not decide, but I determined on the instant that I would accept their invitation and probe a little further into the mystery of Miss Mamie's accident.

She, meanwhile, had been laid in the motor car and covered with a rug, and in a very few minutes we all set out for the house of my new acquaintances, the motor leading the way, and I following in my dog cart.

To my surprise we did not go in the direction in which the motor had been going, but in one exactly opposite, and I wondered what these strange people could have been doing on so stormy and dreary a night, apparently driving aimlessly across the moor.

My speculations came to an abrupt conclusion when, after driving for about a mile, we reached a house standing quite alone upon the moor.

Here we all descended, and it was my privilege to help the coachman carry the senseless form of Miss Mamie into the building. A little involuntary shiver ran through me as we entered the stone hall, there was something so sinister, so forbidding, so grim in the whole aspect of the place.

A woman servant came forward and conducted us upstairs to a bedroom, where we laid our burden on the bed, and left her to the charge of the servant, a harsh-featured creature, to whom I took an instant dislike.

In the passage outside the room I whispered to the coachman, who struck me as being the most friendly and kindly person I had yet seen belonging to the establishment, "What is the name of this house, and of that young lady?" I nodded towards the room we had left, "and of the master?"

"The master's name is Jones—plain Jones," he said with a grim smile, "but Miss Mamie, her name is Trebarven—she's a Cornishwoman. The house——" He broke off abruptly, as a step sounded on the stairs, adding hurriedly under his breath:

"I wouldn't stay here long if I was you, mister."

* * * * *

"And now that you have had a night's rest, Mr. Renshaw, would you like to see our queer Cornish abode?"

It was my hostess who spoke, smiling down the breakfast-table at me, and looking wonderfully handsome in the morning sunshine that flooded the room.

"I should immensely like to see it," I answered. "You are most curiously situated here. I seemed to look sheer into the sea from my window."

"Yes—yes, sheer into the sea—sheer into the sea," chimed in my host, a smile creeping over his features, that gave me a most unaccustomed and unpleasant sensation down my spine. "Overbalance yourself there and you'd never be heard of again," and he laughed so strange, so diabolical a laugh that I glanced at him nervously. I noticed a look of apprehension in his wife's eyes, and the thought shot into my mind that the man could not be quite sane.

However, the next instant he was talking easily and pleasantly, and I derided myself for my ridiculous fancies. No one could have had a more kindly and attentive host and hostess than were Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and yet I had an uneasy sensation of being constantly under supervision, and of living in an uncomfortable, almost weird atmosphere.

My inquiries for Miss Trebarven were met by polite assurances that she was recovering from the shock, that she had explained that the accident had happened because she missed her way in the darkness and fell over the cliff—that their anxiety about her was diminishing—and so on, and so on.

But I did not feel altogether satisfied, though why, I could not explain even to myself, and I fear I took but scanty interest in the tour of the place upon which my host insisted on taking me.

There were evidences of wealth and luxury in the house and its surroundings, but the whole establishment gave me a

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sensation of dreariness and remoteness which impressed me unpleasantly.

We seemed to be at the very end of the earth—as indeed it was, for the house was actually built on a promontory of land surrounded by the sea on three sides, whilst on the fourth stretched the boundless moor.

I was longing to see again the lovely girl I had helped to rescue on the previous night, and it was this longing alone which prevented me from bidding the Jones farewell and taking my departure. But something stronger than I was impelled me to remain, and Mrs. Jones cordially urged me to do so.

I did not like Mrs. Jones. Handsome as she was, gracious as were her manners, hospitable as she appeared to be, she reminded me too much of some kind of beautiful reptile to be altogether congenial. For her husband I entertained a mingled feeling of repulsion and fear, of which I was heartily ashamed, yet which I could not shake off.

It was late in the afternoon of the day after my arrival when I at last saw Miss Mamie Trebarven again, and then I met her by chance upon the stairs.

She looked like some pale and beautiful ghost as she came slowly down, dressed in a soft, white evening gown, her big eyes full of an indefinable fear, her cheeks as white as her dress.

When she saw me a tide of crimson flamed over them, her eyes dilated a little, she put out her hand and touched my sleeve.

"God bless you!" she whispered, "you saved my life. God bless you!"

"I hope you have recovered from the shock?" I said. "How did it all happen? It was a merciful thing I was driving by. Did you slip over?"

"Hush—don't let them hear you talking to me;" she whispered again, looking fearfully round her. "You must not stay here. Go—go at once—why did you come?"

Her manner was so strange that I began to think that I had come into a household of lunatics, but the earnest gravity of her eyes forbade the thought, and making up my mind that she was overwrought after her accident, I replied:

"I came because your brother-in-law and sister kindly invited me. I am taking a driving tour, had lost my way, and was thankful for shelter last night. I am doubly thankful now for having lost my way, and found you!" My voice dropped as I said the words. How could I help saying them, with that lovely face so close above me—those beautiful eyes looking wistfully into mine.

"Hush!—Oh, hush!" she cried, "You must not stay here. Go away soon. Last night was no accident—it——"

Before the sentence ended she had left my side and sped up the landing again, and I heard my host's voice in the hall speaking to his wife.

They had just emerged from the library, and were talking in low, earnest tones, quite unconscious of my proximity.

"If that failed there are other means," Mr. Jones was saying, "but why did you ask this infernal, prying fellow, Renshaw, to stay on? He may see too much!"

"Not he!" his wife's voice answered. "I think I am clever enough to—do as I have done before," and she laughed a low laugh that made my blood run cold, "and I intend to help you get rid of her!"

I heard no more, but turned and ran swiftly upstairs again, and as I stood in my room looking out over the sea, a strange resolve took possession of me.

"I shall stay here for a few days," I said to myself. "Here is some mystery, and I believe *she* is in danger."

There was only one "she" in the world for me at that moment. I had always hitherto scoffed at those who spoke of love at first sight, but now I knew that they only spoke truth, for my whole heart had gone out to Mamie Trobarven. I loved her better than my life.

She was one of the party at dinner that evening, and both Mr. and Mrs. Jones were assiduous in their inquiries about her feelings, and questioned her closely as to the cause of the accident.

"How came you out so late, dear?" her sister asked, fixing her gleaming eyes upon the girl's white face.

Mamie's blue eyes dilated, her lips quivered.

"I—you knew I went to see poor old Granny Hale," she said.

"Yes, of course I knew that"—Mrs. Jones' voice was very smooth—"but I thought you would have been home earlier. Hubert and I were so anxious at last that we drove out to find you."

Remembering the pace they were going when I met them, and their apparent surprise at recognising Mamie when we carried her up from the cliff, I doubted this statement.

"And you missed your way and slipped over the cliff?" Mr. Jones here interrupted, in so authoritative a tone, and with such a glitter in his sinister eyes, that I could not wonder when the girl faltered out—whether it was the truth or no:

"Yes—yes, that was it, I—I missed my way and slipped over."

The subject was then changed, but throughout the meal I noticed how often my host's eyes seemed to hold Mamie's as a cat's flame holds a fascinated bird, and a deadly fear appeared to oppress the poor girl.

When dinner was over we returned to the drawing-room, through whose open windows we could see the sea stretching up to the moonlit sky.

My hostess talked to me—talked as I have seldom heard a woman do—brilliantly, charmingly, gracefully, with a fascination of manner and voice as delightful as it is rare.

A man would not be human who had not yielded to its subtle charm and to her rich beauty, and I felt that I had greatly misjudged her in supposing that *she* could possibly have a hand in any mysteries or nefarious schemes. Besides, was she not Mamie's sister? The sister of my fair, sweet love, who sat a little apart, looking out upon the moonlight, which threw an unearthly radiance over her loveliness.

What then was my amazement when, as I handed her a bedroom candlestick before she went upstairs, she whispered under her breath:

"For God's sake go. Danger is all round you!" There was no time for more. Mrs. Jones was beside us again, and Mamie was saying "Good night," with downcast eyes.

But what did her warning mean? What was the secret of the strangeness I felt all about me, yet could not define? And what danger could possibly lurk here for *me?*

* * * * * * *

The next day passed without incident, though I was ever on the watch; but for what I was watching I had no idea. Only I was convinced that some mystery wrapped me round. I had an uneasy conviction that Mr. Jones was not altogether sane, and I observed two other facts which did not tend to reassure me. One, that I was never allowed to be alone with Mamie for a single instant; the other, my friend the coachman had disappeared from the scene, and that all my inquiries about him failed to elicit any but the vaguest replies.

My hostess became daily more fascinating to me, but though I involuntarily admired her, she repelled me, the more so that I saw she, in some way, frightened her sister.

With the latter I was more and more deeply in love every day, and the bare thought of leaving her was impossible to contemplate. My host and hostess daily pressed, nay, urged me to remain, and sometimes I dared to hope that my feeling for Mamie was returned. Her eyes would occasionally meet mine with a wistful expression in them that seemed to mean more than mere friendliness.

One night as I was preparing for bed, a faint knock sounded on my door, and the next moment a note was thrust under it. The note read as follows:

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"Please be warned. Go to-morrow, for my sake. Beware of my sister.—Mamie."

This extraordinary document I at first put down to my poor love's over-wrought nerves, then I began to believe that something serious lay beneath it, and to ponder upon the advisability of acting on the warning it contained.

But I have never been a coward; I could not flee from an imaginary danger, and, above all, I could not leave the girl I adored! And, after all, I reflected, what possible harm could come to me—a strong, vigorous man in the prime of health and youth?

I was soon to know the truth.

Before dinner that evening, as I sat alone in the library, Mrs. Jones entered, dressed in one of her most superb evening gowns, and with a charming smile, said to me:

"Mr. Renshaw, I have an immense favour to ask of you. I have heard you say you are accustomed to handling locks; the lock of my bureau has suddenly gone wrong. Would you help me with it?"

I willingly followed her, and she ushered me into a tiny octagonal room in which I had never been before.

A bureau stood in one corner, the rest of the furniture consisted only of a chair and table. Hardly was I inside than I heard the door shut sharply behind me, and looking round I found I was alone! Almost at once a small panel was slid back in the door and Mrs. Jones' beautiful face appeared at it, full of a mocking malice and diabolical wickedness.

"Never was a fly so easily caught!" she said, laughing fiendishly. "Did you think we kept you here, and pressed you to stay, for your pleasure? We have found out since your coming that you are rich, Mr. Renshaw. You are not the first man who has sat in that room, and waited for his doom. The floor is a sliding one; presently I shall touch a spring, the floor will slide from under you, and you will find yourself dropped quietly upon the rocks three hundred feet below—unless——" she paused, whilst I looked round me blankly—"you sign that paper on the bureau, promising never to say a word of what has occurred here, and unless you write a cheque, payable to me, of ten thousand pounds. Your cheque book is there, you have fifteen minutes to decide."

The panel was closed. I was alone. Like a caged beast I glared round me. The door was locked; of the four windows in the room three looked out across the sea, from the fourth I could see the gate, the drive, and the road over the moor. Means of escape there was absolutely none. The room jutted out from the rest of the building, and was built directly over the seething water and sharp rocks, hundreds of feet below. It was easy enough to believe in the sliding floor—the deadly fall—and then——

Yet to lend myself to this hideous system of blackmail went against every instinct.

I paced the floor restlessly, revolving scheme after scheme in my mind, to reject them all.

Five minutes passed! I looked at the paper on the table, and at my cheque book, evidently purloined from my room. Then I heard a low sobbing breath outside the door.

"Are you there?" Mamie whispered.

"Yes, my darling," I said with unfaltering voice.

"I tried to warn you," she answered, "I tried——"

Her voice died away, I could hear her descending the stair and in another moment Mrs. Jones' face appeared at the panel in the door.

"Have you decided?" she said, with again that awful smile.

"I will not sign your paper nor the cheque," I said firmly.

"Very well," she sneered, "in a few minutes more you will know what those rocks feel like. You——"

She broke off suddenly, I heard her steps descending, and then she returned swiftly.

"There is a pleasure in store for you," she cried. "My husband is going to give my sister a treat. He is going to send her for a drive in the motor car, and—and you will see what you will see. Perhaps she will join you on the rocks. Watch."

With fast beating heart, and in an agony of terror at her sinister words, I rushed to the window overlooking the entrance, my own danger forgotten in my horror at the ominous tone in Mrs. Jones' voice.

There, drawn up at the door, I saw the motor, snorting and puffing impatiently, and there beside it, her face ashy white, stood Mamie. Mr. Jones was tying her arms with cords, talking rapidly the while, and gesticulating wildly. I could see that Mamie was pleading with him unavailingly, and I tore impotently at the wooden sill craving to go to her help.

Next I saw Mrs. Jones come out upon the drive, and join her husband in taunting her sister. Some of her words of hateful jeering were wafted up to me.

And then a most unforeseen thing happened. Without a second's warning Mr. Jones began tearing from Mamie's arms the cords he had placed there, and rapidly transferring them to his wife's. Madness gleamed in his eyes, madness rang in his laugh, madness was in his voice, as he cried:

"Not Mamie, but you! We will see—we will see. Come along!" Heedless of her cries, her remonstrances, her shrieks, and of Mamie's endeavours to prevent his action, he forced the wretched woman into the car, fastened her in securely, mounted himself, and in another moment they whirled away along the road. My eyes watched them with a stare of fascination, and what was my horror when, a few yards from the gate, I saw the madman turn the vehicle sharply over the grass and in the direction of the cliff. In his wild efforts he overbalanced himself and fell headlong to the earth, but the machine dashed on, on, on, and I could see how the woman inside it shrank back and shut her eyes, that she might not see her awful advancing fate.

At headlong, ghastly speed the car tore over the grass, to the cliff's edge, tottered, swayed for one instant, and then vanished for ever into the depths below!

* * * * * * *

Mamie rescued me from that awful doom, fetching a man to batter in the door and let me out; and Mamie has been my wife for a year, but I cannot even now let her speak of all these horrors. Trebarven House, it transpires, had been hers, as also a large sum of money, coveted by her sister and her sister's husband. They had made more than one attempt on the girl's life, one of which had been to thrust her over the cliff, from which I rescued her. They had also tried to use her as a decoy for their nefarious schemes, but in this they failed, and Mrs. Jones put forth all her own fascination to entrap rich men to the house, and rob them, as they had tried to rob me. Without a doubt long years of wickedness had rendered Hubert Jones insane, and his sudden fall from the car in that culminating moment of madness brought what was the merciful release of death.

John, the coachman, who had been skilfully convoyed away lest he should help Mamie and me, is now in our service; the grim place by the sea and moor was sold, after we had pulled down the octagon room and its sliding floor. The woman who lies beneath the rolling waves, the man who is buried in a distant churchyard, can trouble us no more—with them has died, too, the mystery of Trebarven House.

L. G. Moberley.

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Mrs. Major.

The Girl who Loved a Grey-haired Soldier.

"Did you notice how well and happy Mrs. Major looked?"

That question rose to the lips of many of the people of the village of Saxton as they wended their way homewards from the church after the morning service. The carriage containing the Major and his young wife had passed the straggling groups of church-goers one by one and had been lost in the direction of Hatley Manor.

"Mrs. Major?" queried a relative from another part of the country, turning to his sister-in-law, who had made the remark. "Do you mean that lady who has just passed us in the carriage? The girl—I mean the young woman—who sat in the pew by the side of that elderly, military-looking gentleman with the grey hair? Why do you call her that? She isn't——"

"Yes, she is!" interrupted the other. "She is his wife, and a happier couple you couldn't find all over the Eastern counties, or anywhere else. That's as true as the gospel you've heard preached this very morning. They say it's curious how they came to be married, and I'll tell you what they say when we're having dinner."

The good woman's brother was not the only person who was surprised, interested and moved by the story of the marriage of Beatrice Davenport and Major Hatley, the distinguished officer, now on the retired list. Some people had said, on hearing the announcement of the forthcoming wedding, that snow and roses did not go well together, but time had falsified their predictions in this instance, and had those people known more of the inner mystery of the match, they would have refrained from making the gloomy prophecy.

Major Hatley and Mr. and Mrs. Davenport had been friends together before the marriage of the Davenports, so the Major was a welcome visitor to their house whenever he chanced to be in England. During the first two years of their married life they saw very little of him, as the young lieutenant was away on active service, but he came to see them immediately on his return. Little Trixie was then about a year old, and surprised everyone by holding out her baby arms to the officer after a short scrutiny. From that time they were good friends, and as she grew older her liking for the officer appeared to increase. So confidential did they become that Trixie, at the age of three, informed him that she would marry him when she was old enough, which sent the young officer into a fit of laughter.

Trixie looked a little hurt, so Lieutenant Hatley smoothed his face and said gravely: "Very well, little woman! I'll marry you. Make haste and grow up!"

The child's fondness for the bronzed officer became quite noticeable, and the remark made by her was told as a good joke, but the little girl repeated the statement several times at short intervals during the next six months. Then Lieutenant Hatley's regiment was ordered to Afghanistan, for a time the child made inquiries for her friend, but gradually the old association seemed to fade away, and the incident was forgotten by Mr. and Mrs. Davenport.

The years went by. Lieutenant Hatley became Captain and Major, and returned with his regiment to the old country. He had not heard much of the Davenports during his stay in the East, and he was unable to trace them at first, but he at length met Mr. and Mrs. Davenport by accident on a Rhine steamer during a tour on the Continent.

The meeting was a pleasant one for both sides, and, when cordial greeting had been exchanged, the Major asked:

"And what about my little friend, Trixie? She is getting to be quite a woman now, and has forgotten me, I expect?"

"She is studying at a German High School for Girls, and she will go to a Parisian school to finish," replied her mother with a touch of pride. "She is turned fifteen now, you know, Major. But you are wrong to suppose that she has forgotten you. She asked after you when we saw her the other day, and was glad to learn that you had attained the rank of Major."

"Oh, she hasn't forgotten you, Dick!" chimed in Mr. Davenport. "Are you home for long?"

"I am having a short holiday," responded the soldier, "but I shall be off again soon, as I expect to receive an administrative appointment in Egypt. I am sorry not to have the opportunity of seeing my faithful friend, Trixie," he added with a smile, "but that is a pleasure that must be reserved for a future occasion."

They spent a day or two together, seeing some of the sights of the Rhine district, and then the Major returned to England. A week later he was off to Egypt, to remain there for four years.

Those four years made a great change in Trixie. She was nineteen, and a charming specimen of budding womanhood. She had been presented and was "out," and her father and mother were anticipating with that pleasant fear peculiar to such circumstances, that their lovely daughter would be demanded of them by some eligible member of the highest society.

However, Trixie passed through six weeks of the season without meeting anyone who could capture her maiden heart; she refused two offers, each of which would have given delight to Mr. and Mrs. Davenport. In one case she would have had a title.

"They do not appeal to you, my dear?" asked her mother, when she learnt of the second refusal. "Well, we do not wish to lose you, and you must not accept anyone if you doubt the prospect of happiness with him. There is time enough."

"I shall not leave father and you, dear mamma!" declared Trixie softly. "I shall not marry at all, I believe."

"Ah!" exclaimed her father, who had entered in time to overhear the last remark. "Wait till Mr. Right comes, and then we shall see! I say, what do you think?" he continued, addressing both ladies. "I've had a letter from Hatley, he is giving up his appointment and is coming back to take up his residence at Hatley Manor. The people there will be glad to have the place occupied; it's so much better for them. It is a great pity that so many of our country seats are unoccupied. But the strange part of it is—our new home is only five miles away from Hatley. So we shall see the Major pretty often, I suppose."

Trixie's cheeks were a trifle more rosy as she listened to the concluding words. Suddenly her father turned to her.

"You will see your old friend again, Trixie. How long is it since you saw him? Nearly sixteen years! He asked after you when we met him on the Rhine, you remember? He will require an introduction to you now, for he won't know you. I wonder if you would recognise him?"

"I saw his portrait, father, when we were at the Ryles. I think I should recognise him by that," answered Trixie with an awkward laugh.

"Ryle saw him in Cairo three months ago," pursued Mr. Davenport, "and he tells me that the Major's hair has grown quite iron grey. Let me see! He must be forty-five

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or forty-six. Well, I'll write and tell him where our place is and that we shall *all* be glad to see him!"

So Major Hatley came home, the Manor having been set in order for him and servants engaged. His first visit was to the Davenports, where he saw his former small friend and companion in the form of a beautiful young woman, tall, graceful, charming. He was a man of the world, but it took him a second or two to recover himself sufficiently to make a remark.

That was the first of many visits; being old friends, as well as neighbours, it was but natural that they should visit frequently.

Trixie went out for drives and walks with the Major as with one whom her parents could trust to take care of their daughter without arousing criticism, and so the time spent in the country passed agreeably enough.

"You ought to marry, Dick," said Mr. Davenport one day, while discussing a cigar. "That's a fine old place of yours, and it wants a mistress to complete. I consider that you are not keeping up the reputation of the Manor, and are depriving some woman of a good husband by remaining single. Why don't you look about for one?"

Major Hatley was silent for a while. When he spoke his voice had just a trace of sadness in its tone.

"I daresay you are right," he said, "but the difficulty would be to find a woman who would take me and whom I liked."

"Well, well," laughed Mr. Davenport, "there is a wide field for selection, and you have time enough to look about!"

The subject was then changed, Mr. Davenport congratulating himself on having given Dick something to think about.

The Davenports and the Major went to London for the winter, but the Davenports returned to the country before the Major went back to the Manor. It was during this extra sojourn in London that an incident occurred which had the effect of changing the course of two lives. The Major met old Colonel Wallis, who had been his superior officer at one time in India, and the latter asked a favour.

"It's like this, old fellow," said the Colonel familiarly. "My boy, Arthur, is quite in love with Miss Beatrice Davenport. He's a good lad, and he will have a fair amount of money when his uncle dies, his great-uncle I ought to say. You know all about that affair, Hatley, it ought to come to me, but I rather offended the old boy, and he's going to give it to Arthur. It's all the same. Well, Arthur wouldn't be a bad match for Miss Davenport. But he wants a good opportunity, he couldn't get a real fair chance among all the fellows who crowded about her. That is why I come to you."

The Major did not quite see the drift of the conversation, but his old comrade's words were making him think.

"So," went on the other, "I thought I would ask you if you would invite him to stay with you for a fortnight. I know that the Manor is not far from the Davenport's country house, and that you are always seeing them; that would throw Arthur into her society, and he would have the field almost to himself. At the same time, the fact of his being with you would act as a recommendation with Miss Davenport."

"I don't think I have much influence over Miss Davenport," protested Major Hatley.

"Oh, haven't you!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Why Arthur says that she thinks an awful lot of you. Those were his very words. She is always mentioning you in some connection or other, and you could influence her more than her own father. 'The Major' she calls you, and it's always something about the Major, so Arthur says."

Colonel Wallis waited for Hatley to extend the invitation, and this, arousing himself from the reverie into which he was again falling, the Major did.

"Let him come to me and stay as long as he likes!" he cried heartily. "I am ready to do a good turn to your son or to you for the sake of old times, Wallis. I cannot guarantee the result, of course."

"Of course!" echoed Wallis. "But you can get a good word in for him, no doubt. I'll send on to the lad, but he won't be able to go for at least a fortnight. When do you return, Hatley?"

"At once!"

"I thought you were not going till the end of the week. Well, Arthur will write to you."

As Major Hatley went home he mused on this request.

"It will be best, after all, to see her settled. He's a good lad, I know, so I hope he will make her happy. I wonder what made me say I was going back immediately? Still, it will be as well as stopping here. I can put a word in for young Wallis before he comes. Ah, me! *He* hasn't grey hair and moustache!"

The Davenports were surprised and pleased to see him back earlier than intended. Trixie welcomed him warmly, and the Major thought of his promise. How should he introduce the subject of young Wallis? He wondered if he could begin the conversation by reminding her of her childish remark—"I'll marry you when I'm growed up!" and then lead on to Arthur. He and Trixie and her parents had joked about that remark several times during the first weeks of their renewed acquaintance at the country seat, but lately that joke had been studiously avoided.

He declined to shelve the matter till the following day. On the next day he met her half-way through a wood that lay between the Davenport's home and Hatley Manor. She was looking more charming than ever; her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright and sparkling, her dainty form showing to advantage in a dainty dress, a comfortable-looking jacket and a becoming hat.

"I have wondered of late," he said, going boldly to the subject as they walked side by side, "why you have not accepted some young fellow for a husband. I am sure that you had a good selection."

"I don't want 'some young fellow for a husband,' Major," she replied, quoting his own words.

He looked at her curiously; there seemed to be some ambiguity as to her meaning. Why had she quoted the words uttered by him?

"It would be better than some old man—some man with grey hair—would it not?"

"I—I really," she began, hesitatingly. Then, observing that his eyes were fixed on hers, she blushed prettily. "Major," she said simply, "I suppose it would be regarded as very unwomanly, but I am going to do it. I told you as a child that I would marry you when I was big enough, and I am still of that opinion!" She held out her hand. "Do *you* think I am big enough yet?"

Major Hatley asked himself if he could believe the evidence of his ears and eyes. He realised what he had felt but had tried to hide from himself, namely, that he loved this girl as passionately as man could love. Yet, was it fair to her?

"I am grey-haired, Trixie," he said gravely, but taking her hand as if he feared that she would agree with him and draw away, "and——"

"I like it!" responded Trixie. "I have not changed my mind since I was a little girl. If you think I am now 'growed up,' then I am ready."

The Major felt rather ashamed of his promise to Arthur Wallis not having been kept, but he wrote frankly to Colonel Wallis, and his explanation was accepted just as frankly.

Thus it came about that Trixie became "Mrs. Major," and the union has been blessed with the greatest happiness.

Geo. Day.

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A JAPANESE IDYLL.

A Sad Love Tale of a Geisha Girl.

The early morning sun was bathing the peaks of Okinawa with the roseate tints of its blushing dawn, as the white hulled yacht *Irene* steamed into the little bay of Hisomai, cutting the azure wavelets with many a foaming splash as she passed between the headlands, which shelter the entrance of this natural harbour.

Cecil Mavesleigh stood on the bridge of his yacht conning the rapidly-approaching shore through his glasses, when turning to the man who stood beside him, said carelessly: "So we are before Temple, after all, Conyers!"

Conyers smiled.

"Barely surprising, is it? The *Irene* steams five knots faster than the *Yaiskic;* besides, old man, you know that Temple can hardly ever tear himself away from Hong Kong under a month."

The angry churning of waters astern lessened, to finally die away as the throbbing screws came to a standstill, and the *Irene*, its brass fittings refracting the beams of the early sun, hove to, a quarter of a mile from the shore.

It was late in the afternoon before Cecil Mavesleigh and his chum Geoffrey Conyers landed on the white shingle beach, against which the tiny wavelets broke in mimic fury, and proceeded to walk through the little township of Aosima. The quaint houses peeping from among high trees, and their quainter inhabitants, both pleased and charmed Cecil Mavesleigh as he strolled along, to finally halt at a tea-house on the banks of the tiny river Vensi, which debouches into the bay of Hisomai.

Sheltering themselves from the sun's still powerful rays beneath the tea-house's spacious verandah, they proceeded to inform the obsequious Chinese proprietor that a cup of tea would prove refreshing. The Celestial beamed approvingly, and waddled off to execute the order with as much celerity as his corpulence admitted.

In due course the tea was brought, not by the Chinese proprietor, but by a Geisha of such exquisite beauty that Mavesleigh dropped the cigar he was smoking in amazement. Even the blasé Conyers surveyed the dainty little Japanese with approving eyes as she placed the fragile cups on the table beside them. Mavesleigh stroked his moustache thoughtfully, and then said, smiling, in perfect Japanese:

"I had no idea that Japan contained so pretty a Geisha!"

The little tea girl glanced covertly from beneath her long lashes at the handsome face turned to hers; then a blush stole over her cheeks.

"There are many such as I," she said modestly. "Many far prettier! Tea-house proprietors always choose those who are not ugly of feature to wait on their patrons, and to amuse them. . . . They come more often, if the Geishas are pretty," she added naively.

Mavesleigh smiled amusedly.

"Deuced good idea!" he remarked under his breath. Then added aloud: "How do you amuse your patrons?"

"I dance and sing. All who come here say that none can dance and sing so well in Okiawa or any of the Loo Choo islands as O Kiki San." There was a soft ring of pride in her voice as she made this statement, then looking straight into his clear blue eyes, she added shyly: "Perhaps you would like to be amused?"

"Emphatically!" he replied promptly, delighted with her naiveté.

"Shall I dance?"

"Yes, please—unless it is too hot," answered Mavesleigh interestedly, sipping his tea.

She was gone like a flash, returning a few minutes later with five other Geishas carrying instruments and a large mat, on which, as soon as it was spread out, O Kiki San took up a position, whilst her companions commenced to play a low, weird melody. A few bars rang out on the still, perfumed air, then O Kiki San, with a noiseless, easy grace, began her dance. Silently, with wonderful rapidity, and ease of action, the Geisha danced before the admiring Mavesleigh. Swaying lithely to and fro she alternately approached and receded from the visitors, the rapidly-dying sun illuminating the beautiful face of the dancer as she flitted from the shade of the overspreading trees into the evening glow

Faster and faster grew the measure of the dance till Mavesleigh grew dazzled, and O Kiki San appeared but a revolving figure of multi-coloured silks glinting in the fading sunlight. Spell-bound he watched her, then as the dance ceased, said softly:

"Thanks, O Kiki San!"

The little Geisha smiled as she approached the table to remove the cups.

"Will you sing to me?" he said gently.

"Not to-day," he answered. "I am tired. Another day I will, if it pleases the English lord."

"I am not an English lord," he laughed.

"Are not all Englishmen lords . . . . even if only in their own estimation?"

He smiled as he gave her the three sen due, then said, rising: "You are as smart as you are pretty!"

"Were I ugly," she smiled merrily, "I should not be a Geisha here."

"And you will break many a heart before you grow much older," he continued sagely.

A gay smile flitted nervously about the corners of her mouth.

"Good-bye," she said politely, and as she watched Mavesleigh's tall figure disappear amid the trees of the garden she experienced for the first time an odd feeling of regret, and a strange longing to see him again.

Mavesleigh was strangely silent all the way to his yacht, a fact which disgusted Conyers much.

"I believe that you are in love with the Geisha," he remarked sharply to his chum, when they were on board.

"What if I am?" replied Mavesleigh irritably.

"I believe you are engaged to my cousin, Nina Howard," replied Conyers icily. "That's why. Have you forgotten that circumstance?"

"I am not likely to be allowed to do that, either by you—or her," answered Mavesleigh angrily. "However, Conyers, since you seem to evince so keen a concern in my affairs you may be pleased to know that I am not in love with 'that Geisha'!"

"Silly ass!" growled Conyers annoyedly, as his chum slammed the door of his cabin to. "How dare he fool about with Geishas when he's engaged to Nina?"

From within Mavesleigh's cabin the opening bars of a melody twanged on a banjo were drifted to his ears. It was the air to which O Kiki San had danced an hour previously.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" muttered Conyers savagely angrily chewing the end of his cigar.

The following afternoon the Honourable Cecil went ashore alone and wended his way to the garden of Ti Sung, ostensibly for tea, in reality to see O Kiki San.

"Where have you been?" was all the greeting vouchsafed by Conyers on his return.

"Ashore," replied Mavesleigh briefly.

"You've been hanging round the confounded Geisha!"

Mavesleigh grinned unfeelingly.

"What ho if I have?" he asked genially. "Are you my keeper? Shut up, old man, and let a fellow enjoy his

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wretched life! Have a lime-juice and give up trying to make a storm in a tea-cup."

Maversleigh's geniality jarring, Conyers refused the lime-juice and betook himself to whisky.

For a whole fortnight the Honourable Cecil went ashore alone, till one evening, beneath the spreading trees, the deep shadows of which the soft glow of the paper lanterns but dimly dissipated, O Kiki San redeemed her promise and sang to him.

It was a strange, wild, love song, a passionate burst of melody sung by a soprano of rare sweetness and purity. By turns wistful, commanding, endearing and tender, it swelled ever and anon with the latent fire of jealousy to lapse again into the loving and intreating. Strange and unaccustomed to his trained Western notions, the song nevertheless enraptured him, till when the last cooing notes died away in enthralling sweetness, Maversleigh exclaimed:

"A wild song, little Kiki! Yet it is very sweet."

"It is my favourite," she answered softly, raising her dark eyes to his.

"It is the kind of song to sing to your lover!"

"Having none," she replied gently, "I only sing it as a matter of business. I have only loved once, and I love the same man still. But he does not love me. He is as far beyond my reach as yonder star." She sighed and then added—"I would give thirty years of my life to wed him whom I love."

A fierce wave of jealousy passed over Maversleigh.

"Who is he—this man?"

"Do you think a Japanese maiden tells the world whom she loves?" the little Geisha queried proudly. "No! I have told none that I love, save you! You are different from the others who come to this tea garden, otherwise I should not have told even you. There was another reason which prompted me to tell you."

"Which was?"

"Because I—like you!" The admission was made blushingly.

"I wish that you could love instead of merely liking me," he exclaimed moodily.

"Would you care for me—a simple tea girl—to do so?" she asked softly, seating herself at his feet and glancing shyly up at him.

"I would give the world to be that—man you love!" he answered passionately. "Kiki! My darling, I know that I am a beastly cad to tell you that I love you after what you have told me—!"

"Why? I never said that *he* loved me."

"Then, darling, are you so blind that you cannot see that—I worship you?"

"Ceceel!" There was a depth of love in her voice as she rose and placed her hands behind her back. "Would you be pleased to know—that you are—that man?"

"Kiki!" He started to his feet amazed, clasping her slim form in his arms as he passionately kissed her lips. The little Geisha remained passive in his embrace, her heart beating wildly, contented in the consummation of her wish.

"Kiki, my little girl," he said, stroking her hair with a loving touch. "Is it really true that you love me?"

"True?" The dark, soulful eyes were raised to his, a wealth of love lighting their liquid depths. She nestled closer into the incircling arms, pillowing her head on his breast. "Ceceel, are you so blind, then, that you cannot see it? And you, dearest, you love truly? Not merely transitorily, but really?"

"What is your opinion, Kiki, on that score?"

Silence answered his question, broken only by the soft sighing of the night breeze through the overhanging trees.

"Well, darling?"

"I would speak as I wish it to be, Ceceel, therefore I am no judge! But I am happy in the thought that you love me—oh, so—so happy!"

She sighed contentedly, her soft breath caressing his cheek, and then said gently: "Oh, Ceceel, my darling, should your love grow cold, it would chill my heart to death!"

"Why should my love grow cold?" The question was softly posed.

"They say that man's love is like the restless wave, ever changing," she murmured.

He was about to indignantly deny this aspersion on the sex when the Chinese proprietor's voice was heard calling for O Kiki San.

"Good-bye, my darling!" he whispered. "The time will soon come when no one will have the right to call you from my side."

"Oh, that you may never change!" she answered, kissing him almost fiercely. The next instant she was gone and Maversleigh strolled down towards the beach.

The dinghy was waiting for him, grounded on the beach. Silently he sat in the stern sheets, and taking the yoke lines in his hands, noticed for the first time the riding light of another vessel some two cables' length away from the *Irene* on her port quarter.

"What boat is that, Haversby?" he asked the sailor pulling stroke.

"The *Yaiskie*, sir—Come in two hours ago."

A muttered imprecation burst from between Maversleigh's lips as the dinghy breasted the wavelets with a long, swinging stroke towards his yacht.

Conyers was in the smoking-room when he entered it, calmly smoking a cheeroot.

"What, ho!" he exclaimed. "Well, Maversleigh, the *Yaiskie* has come, with your *fiancée* on board."

"The dickens!"

Conyers laughed gratingly. "My dear boy, you're not civil to my cousin, 'pon my word, you're not," he remarked easily. "As you are at the locker, man, mix me a whisky. I suppose you've been fooling about that artful little minx, O Kiki San?"

Maversleigh turned round on his chum, his face livid.

"Look here, Conyers," he cried hoarsely. "You are presuming too much on our chumminess. By Heaven, you are! I love O Kiki San, and by George, you'll have to be civil when you refer to her, or there'll be a rumpus! I've given you due warning, now mind!"

Conyers' face clouded.

"Did I understand you to say that you loved her—that miserable girl?"

"Yes!" shouted Maversleigh furiously, bringing his fist down with a terrific crash on the smoke-room table. "You did! Now what have you to say?"

"Much," replied Conyers coldly. "You are engaged to my cousin, Nina Howard."

"Well?" retorted Maversleigh passionately. "That engagement is off!"

"Like the cold goose at Christmas, eh?" snarled Conyers. "You pitiful fool! You rank idiot! Might I inquire how you are going to silence Rimmelheim and Jacobs if you are not going to marry Nina? Is this Kiki an heiress, too?"

Maversleigh paled, then strode up and down the cabin.

"I also notice that you are utterly indifferent as regards breaking hearts!" sneered Conyers.

"I should not break Nina's heart! She wishes to marry me, because my brother is on his death-bed, and if she marries me on or after his decease she will wear a countess' coronet.

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Such brow garnishments possess peculiar attractions to America and Americans."

Conyers shrugged his shoulders placidly.

"In exchange you have the dollars," he replied coldly. "However, you wrong her in making that assertion. In my opinion, Maversleigh, you, to speak plainly, have acted like a cad both to her and the Geisha girl."

Conyers expected an outburst of fury, a torrent of invectives, but he was disappointed.

"You are right, Conyers," Maversleigh muttered hoarsely. "I have!" He opened the smoke-room door and strode out alone on to the murky deck.

"I must marry Nina," he mused savagely. "I must, or else die in poverty, and fail to keep my word with those infernal Jews, curse them! I should be a rich man to-day if it wasn't for Rimmelheim and Jacobs! I have been a cad to make love to Kiki, poor little girl! Conyers was right there, and it's deuced hard to admit it! Yes, there's no help for it! I must marry Nina, and enjoy all the fruits of a loveless marriage."

For an hour he paced up and down, then leaning over the taffrail gazed sadly across the little township of Aosima, dimly outlined in the silvery sheen of the rising moon.

"Oh, Kiki, my darling!" he murmured despairingly, "Must I leave you? You, who are my only love!"

The following evening the Honourable Cecil Maversleigh once more visited the tea-garden, and once again his eyes revelled in the beauty of the little Japanese, as Kiki, with a flush of pleasure mantling her cheeks, came to him, placing with nimble fingers a sprig of mimosa in his buttonhole.

"I thought that you were never coming, Ceceel," she said caressingly, as they sauntered down a secluded alley.

"Am I so late, then?" he queried awkwardly.

"Oh, so late! At least, it seems so to me," she replied, smiling up at him. "When one loves, even a minute's wait seems an eternity."

He felt his cheeks flame red with shame.

"Did you think I should leave Okinawa without saying good-bye to you, my darling?"

The hand resting on his arm trembled convulsively. He started shamefacedly like a criminal detected in his crime.

"You are leaving Okinawa?" she exclaimed dully.

"To-morrow," he replied, bracing himself together for the ordeal. "And I shall never return!"

"Never return!" she echoed wildly. "Ceceel, what is to become of me?"

"You will remain here in the tea-garden, I suppose."

He turned his head away, swallowed a lump in his throat and added, "And be the sweet little Geisha to—to others—as—ah, God!—as you have been to me!"

"But, Ceceel—Ceceel, my darling! I love you so!" she cried wildly. "You cannot have the heart to leave me here!—I love you so!"

"And I—Do I not love you madly, Kiki?" he exclaimed fervently. "Oh, Kiki!—my darling!—my love!—I must wed another far less beautiful than you. I am ruined and must recoup my losses. I must marry this woman, for I pledged her my word, long before I saw your sweet face—but you have to all eternity my heart! And I must part from you, Kiki, and leave you who are my life, my all!"

"Ceceel! Ceceel!" she cried feverishly, raising her tear-blurred eyes to his, while her soft, shapely arms stole gently round his neck. "She cannot love you as I do! You love me better than you do her! Forsake this lady, darling, and forsaking her, love me alone! I cannot spare your love to another."

"You do not understand our Western customs, my little Kiki," he cried tremulously. "You do not realise the light in which I stand! Yes, my darling, you are right when you say you love me better than she does. She only desires my future coronet. Had I not that, she would not want to marry me!"

"Give it to her, then," she said naively, smiling through her tears. "Then nothing will stand between us."

He smiled, despite his misery, at her innocence.

"It cannot be," he cried despairingly, kissing her passionately. "I must go from you, my love, never to return! I have sold myself and must stand by my bargain now."

"Ceceel, you cannot be so cruel!"

"Kiki, Kiki! Cannot you see how miserable I am? Don't make this parting harder than I can bear!" he cried hoarsely.

"Not that!" she cried passionately, sinking on her knees at his feet. "Ah, Ceceel, not that! Not parting! I will be your servant, your slave—only take me with you."

She kissed his hand passionately, then continued with her voice trembling with passion. "I will be so good, my love! So quiet! I will never worry you with my love! I will stand by and see you kiss and love another without a murmur! I will be dumb as long as I can see you from afar! Ceceel, my darling! Do not shake your head—take me with you. I love you so!"

"Oh, Kiki, my own, it cannot—cannot be! I shall have to love and cherish that dollar woman I am to marry. If you were nigh"—he turned away his head—"that could never be.

"Oh, Ceceel—Ceceel, don't—ah, don't leave me here to——"

He raised her from the ground, stopped her pitiful pleadings with a passionate kiss on her quivering lips, and then fled from the valley to the beach.

"To the yacht," he commanded, seating himself in the dinghy. "Now then, men, pull!"

The morning dawned clear and bright on the bay of Hisomai, when Aosima awoke into activity. The tiny wavelets broke on the shingle beach with a caressing hiss among the stones, lapping against the body of a Geisha which the sea had cast up.

Far away on the horizon westwards, two streaks of smoke against the azure heavens marked the positions of the *Irene* and the *Yaiskie*. From mouth to mouth the news flew through Aosima, that a body was on the beach, and soon the chattering townsfolk recognised the dead as O Kiki San.

In her hand she clasped with a terrible grip the gold locket which, on being opened, revealed a portrait of Maversleigh. Such was the finish of a Geisha's dream!

A year elapsed before a yacht once more steamed into the placid harbour. Half an hour after it had anchored, a yachtsman landed, wearing a deep band of crape round his cap, and a faded sprig of mimosa in his buttonhole.

He gave his name as the Earl of Kinfusis, and Aosima knew ere an hour was out, that he was travelling to forget the loss of his wife.

Meanwhile the Earl had gone to the tea-garden of Kung Li, and had inquired for O Kiki San.

The Chinaman smiled simply.

"Piecee girlee die, allee samee blown herself," replied the Celestial placidly. "You oncee piecee fond of O Kiki San, eh? Velly nicee girlee, sell plenty tea."

Cecil Maversleigh staggered like a drunken man, then sinking into a chair, gasped hoarsely.

"Too late! Ah, Heaven, too late! I have indeed parted from my darling for ever!"

And a tear, which he had the manliness not to be ashamed of, stole down his cheek.

Tristam K. Monck.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

THE STORY STARTS HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin, with Fluffy's help, stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, and during this interview Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Frankie left the room; but I stayed, and, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope, overheard Hope (who turns out to be Kinross' cousin) tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. I told Frankie what I had overheard.

On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston informed Frankie that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with a man from Jamaica who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored. She persuaded me, much against my will, to engage Hope's attention by making love to him, while she herself purchased the Jamaica man's silence. He agreed to be silent for the sum of £1,000 to be paid before noon on the following day. I had to go to Fluffy's chambers to get the money. It was past midnight, and while negotiating with Fluffy, Percival Hope burst into the room. Fluffy saved the situation by telling him that I had come to get money to pay my debts, whereupon Hope immediately advanced me £1,000.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. He and Kinross arrived with Casellis at Pont Street, and Casellis was asked to say what he knows of Frankie's dark past, but, instead of disclosing any unpleasant facts, he swore that she was a perfectly innocent woman.

Several other witnesses were called, but Frankie scored over each one in turn. Thus baffled; Hope left, and Kinross formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived.

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Sir John Gets His Answer.

Sir John came slowly up the hall. He struck me as looking very ill. There was a stoop in his shoulders, usually erect; his head hung, he seemed crushed. Usually the most courteous of men, he did not return my greeting—hardly seemed to hear it.

"Your cousin's not at home, they tell me," he said at last. "I'll wait for her return, if you don't mind."

As he spoke he grasped the handle of the drawing-room door, and, before I could prevent him, entered.

As I have said, the drawing-room was the first of three reception rooms. They led one into the other, curtained archways taking the place of doors. Frankie and Lord Kinross had retired into the third and last of the series. Sir John stationed himself in the first. His proximity to the other two was closer than I cared for, at any moment they might appear. And then——

"Won't you come into the morning-room, Sir John?" I asked in a faint voice. "It's quieter there, and you look tired."

"I am tired—too tired to move. I want to rest, but——" he passed his hand wearily across his forehead. "I've so many things to think of. Will your cousin be back soon?"

I shook my head, I could not trust myself to speak.

"She is well? Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Nothing," I returned. "Don't you think it would be wiser for you to go home now and call again this evening? It's wretched to wait for a person, and—and Frankie may keep you waiting a long time."

"It doesn't signify, so that I see her at last." His manner was so strange that it alarmed me.

"What is the matter?" I asked, trembling. "Have you had bad news in the City?"

"Yes, very bad."

"Is it—is it the Carnegie Gold Mine?"

"Yes, the company's bankrupt, the shareholders ruined, the directors disgraced." He roused himself from his apathy, and spoke quickly, sharply, so that I dreaded he might be overheard.

"It was a fraud from beginning to end," he went on, working himself up. "The mine was worn out, as the company promoters knew quite well. The whole thing was worked to cheat the public. They read the prospectus, and, gulled by its glowing account of the 'Carnegie,' bought the shares. The money they paid, save for a few thousands, went into the pockets of the promoters, who were also directors of the company. Directors!" he sneered. "Cowards, cheats! When I went down to the office this morning not one of them was there! On the Continent, gone yachting, anywhere rather than at their post. For three hours I stood a mark for the shareholders' rage and abuse. God knows, I'm sorry for them! I've stripped myself of every penny to mitigate their loss, but my few thousands seem as nothing."

"But the other directors, won't they help to pay back the shareholders?"

"Not with a penny. They even sold what few shares they held a week ago when the market was up. They are not legally responsible, and therefore can wash their hands of the matter."

"Then why should you give up your money? What have you gained from your connection with the Carnegie?"

"Dishonour—nothing else. Yes," as I strove to contradict him, "I say dishonour. I knew nothing of mines, nothing of companies, nothing of the concern that, like a fool, I pledged myself to direct. I gave my name as guarantee of the good faith of what has proved a fraud, a cheat, a lie." His voice rose with passion, then broke into a low, hoarse whisper. "A lie," he gasped, "and I put my name to it."

He leant forward, hiding his face in his hands.

I watched him, fear and pity at my heart. His pride shattered, his will weakened, he sat a broken and a ruined man. And she, the woman who had done this thing, remembering what he had been and was now, could bear to see him, would smile and talk—the ripple of her laughter came through the curtains. I caught my breath. If she should come now, she and her lover, and Sir John should see them!

Desperate with fear, I fell on my knees beside him, and urged him, incoherent in my terror, to go home—at once, this minute.

He glanced up quickly, something of the old look came into his face at the sight of my distress.

"I've upset you," he said kindly. "It was very selfish of me. But you mustn't worry, I'm not ill. I shall get through all right. Come, don't look like that. Poor little girl, you're frightened." And he put me gently in a chair.

"It was a big blow at first," he went on quietly. "But it will grow easier to bear. I reproach myself terribly, but"—he paused—"I wanted money very badly." He was talking as much to himself as to me, arguing the case aloud. "You see," he smiled sadly, almost apologetically, "she can't bear the thought of poverty. She is so fond of nice things and pretty frocks and jewels. Who can wonder? Nobody could expect a woman like that to go without, and——" he broke off short, and turned towards me. "Don't you know at all when your cousin will be back? I want to tell her what has happened. You know how things are between us? Yes, I thought so. You can understand, then, how much I want to see her, to hear her say that, after all, it doesn't matter very much if I am poor, it will only mean a little longer waiting. We shall have to wait, Cynthia, but she won't mind it. It will be a long time. I shall have to start from the bottom of the ladder, and—and I'm not a young man. But she'll wait. I'm not afraid of that. But—I wish she'd come. I'm tired now, worried, depressed; but it will all vanish when she comes. All will be right when I see her."

It seemed to me he glanced towards the curtained archway. I fancied he was going through.

"No, no," I gasped, strangling a scream, "not there!" I rushed and stood in front of him.

His face changed, surprise deepening into suspicion.

"What is it?" he asked sternly. "What are you hiding?"

By this time I was past all self-control. I could only wring my hands and incoherently beseech.

Sir John put me aside, marched towards the archway, and drawing back the hangings, passed through. He paused a moment, and stood as if expectant—listening.

Across the stillness came the sound of voices. I recognised the tender mocking thrill that Frankie always practised on her lovers. Sir John seemed to recognise it too. He started, and crossed quickly to the threshold of the inner room, where Frankie and Lord Kinross sat.

The curtains were half drawn. A graceful figure in her slim white frock, Frankie leant timidly—her eyes downcast—against her lover. Through the open window the sun fell on her golden hair, her fair face and tender eyes. She drooped towards Kinross like a tall, white lily.

The figure at my side stiffened, silent and grim, with a face of stone; not a muscle relaxed, not a sigh escaped him. But when the other far less tender lover caught her in his arms, with a swift movement drew her face to his, eagerly kissed her eyes, mouth, and hair—when, I say, he saw that other do these things, the great heart of the man beside me failed.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

(Continued.

With a low, hurt cry he staggered forward a few paces, only to fall at last senseless, helpless at my cousin's feet.

I don't remember just what followed. I turned faint, and hid my face. When I looked up again Sir John was lying on the sofa with a strange look on his face, a rigidity about his figure.

"A paralytic seizure," said the doctor, and shook his head over the chances of recovery. We wired for Mrs. Ponsonby, Sir John's sister, and pending her arrival Lady Gaveston, efficient and severe, controlled the situation, taking the patient under her charge.

All that night I sat upon the stairs waiting in forlorn hope for better news.

Toby—steadied by the shock he had proved himself most useful—shared my vigil a few stairs higher up. Kinross, at Frankie's wish, had not remained. He was very sympathetic, and had asked no awkward questions, but seemed a touch reserved.

Towards the morning I must have dozed. I awoke to find the door wide open. I cautiously peeped in. Lady Gaveston still erect, was sleeping stiffly in her chair; at Sir John's side knelt a woman, her face hidden in her hands, weeping bitterly. It was my cousin Frankie.

"John, if you could speak to me! If you would say something. I can't bear it. I can't," she clenched her hands, gripping the rug that covered him. "Never a word, a look from him, that was not kind. Always tenderness and love. What shall I do?" she rocked herself to and fro. "What shall I do? If I'd known, if I'd guessed it would be like this. John!" she turned to him, laying her head beside his on the pillow, stroking his hair, begging him wildly, passionately to answer.

Calm and still, with a far-off look in the quiet eyes, he lay unheeding; even the woman he had loved so dearly could not rouse him, nor could her voice recall. In vain her tears, her cries, her lamentations. Too late! Too late!

Lady Gaveston, suddenly roused, turned in her chair.

"It's over late for greeting, woman," she said sternly. "This is no time for tears. Get you up," she laid her hand on Frankie's arm.

"He will get better?" pleaded Frankie. "Tell me he will get better."

Milady shook her head.

"It's not I that can tell you even a thing—you've much to answer for, Frances."

My cousin made no effort to defend herself, but went quietly out. I caught a glimpse of her face as she passed me in the hall. Tear-stained and haggard, it was like some other woman's face—not my cousin's. Could it be she had loved him after all?

I pondered on the matter till I grew cold, and felt inclined to make coffee. Toby had vaunted his powers in this direction at intervals all night. I turned to wake him. To my astonishment, he was not there!

Two days later Mrs. Ponsonby arrived, and moved Sir John away. There was no change in him, nor, said the doctor, was it likely that there ever would be.

For a while Frankie seemed depressed and looked ill. Gradually, however, she recovered her spirits. Her engagement by this time was made public. She received hosts of congratulations, everyone paid her compliments, her friends and enemies alike—more or less sugared as the case might be. Among the first to call were Chesterton and Toby Ffolliott.

I had not seen Toby since he so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared in the middle of the night. I judged it was not a favourable time to ask for explanations. He looked ill and wretched, his health of late was no better than his temper.

Lord Chesterton was very nice to me. He made no actual reference to the mystery of the notes, but made me understand that whoever else might be to blame, he did not think I was. How different from Percival Hope! He had neither written nor been near me.

Chesterton went after an hour or so; Toby, however, showed no signs of leaving, but stuck firm as a limpet on his chair. I read the signs of a storm in his face, and dreaded an unpleasant scene. With great determination and bad taste he waited till the last guest had left, outstaying Kinross himself.

He wasted no time in preliminaries, but came to the point at once.

"Is it true that you are engaged to Kinross, Frankie?"

My cousin, raidant in a wonderful tea-gown of rose chiffon over silk, smiled and nodded.

"Yes," she said, "quite."

"You're going to marry him?"

"It is usual in such cases, I believe!"

Toby got up and came towards her.

"I say you *shan't*," he said doggedly. "You promised to marry me."

Frankie laughed softly.

"What do you propose to marry on?" she asked.

The boy winced. "I thought——" he stopped blankly. "I've prospects you know," he plucked up spirit as he went on, "and I shall get a larger salary each year."

"I don't propose to marry on 'prospects,' and the chance of an increase of salary," said my cousin firmly. "The case lies thus—I am poor—yes," as the boy looked incredulous, "quite poor. I've been extravagant, infringed on my capital, until there's little left. Another three months will see me at the end of my tether. I shall sink into oblivion unless—" she paused. "I must marry money," she said firmly.

"But you promised *me*," he argued wildly.

"Don't be a fool, Toby. How can I marry a man with neither money nor brains? I used to think you were clever. When I made you that promise I thought you were ambitious, that you had initiative, go. I find I was mistaken. You've changed, Toby, changed for the worse."

"And who's responsible for that?" he almost shouted.

Frankie shrugged her shoulders.

"I should say it was brandy," she answered insolently.

The boy winced and coloured to his temples.

"You're wrong," he said slowly. "It's *you*. I mean it, I'm going to tell you just how I mean it, and—you're going to listen." He walked straight up to her, his young face white and drawn.

"I wasn't a bad sort of chap before," he said. "There was nothing much to be ashamed of in my life. Now it's quite different. Day and night the horror of what I've done grips me. Do you think I can ever forget it? Ever forget I forged another man's name? Oh, I know you don't think very much of it. Forgery is quite a small thing in your eyes. But in mine—it's—it's fiendish!"

"It's manly to reproach me," said Frankie.

"It's human. I did it because—I loved you, because I thought that you loved me. Now I know that you don't care a farthing about anybody but yourself. You'd cheerfully send a man to death if his dying would pay your bills. Not a man, not a woman whose weakness you don't trade on. Not a friend, a lover, that you don't betray. Do you think I don't know? What of Mary Vernon, whose sweetheart you stole? What of Sir John——"

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"If he were here you would not dare to speak to me like this."

"Whose fault is it that he is not? I don't wonder you flinch, even you must needs feel some remorse. I saw you stand in tears beside him. Heard you confess what you had done. What is there to prevent my telling Kinross what I heard? Why should I not tell him what you are?"

She didn't seem afraid, but smiled at him with a curious expression.

Her smile seemed to madden Toby.

"You—you *devil*!" he said under his breath. "Why shouldn't I ruin you?"

He gripped her tightly by the arms, but with a quick movement she freed herself and clasped her hands about his neck. "Why?" she asked with a little laugh. "Why? Because you love me. Come," she drew his head level with her own, looking into his eyes. "Kiss me," she said.

A short, tense pause, then, with a gasp, half sob, half sigh, he kissed and clasped her tightly.

"Don't turn me off, Frankie," he said hoarsely. "I don't mind what you do, but I can't live without you." He kissed her hands, holding her tight; he begged her forgiveness, praying that she would see him *sometimes*. Yes, she might be engaged to Kinross, he wouldn't interfere. She might do anything if she would see him, and be kind.

He had no thought of honour towards his friend. His infatuation left no room for better things.

It wasn't a nice spectacle to witness. I left the room and went upstairs.

Frankie followed shortly and asked me to get ready for a drive.

"I'm going to see Mary Vernon," she said, "and I want you to come too." She made no reference to Toby, and I felt relieved at her silence. Some things are better not spoken of.

Mary Vernon was at home, and received us with her usual friendliness. Frankie turned me on to Mrs. Vernon, a little woman with a big flow of small talk, and seated herself by Mary, some short distance off.

Frankie had come to tell her friend that she was engaged to Kinross. I knew it, I felt it, and admired the courage that could face that friend's reproaches.

Mary flushed during Frankie's introductory speech, turning her eyes away.

"Answer me this," she said at last. Her voice was low, but I caught the words, Mrs. Vernon's fatuous remarks seemed to throw them up.

"Do you love Hartland? Sincerely, deeply?"

Frankie nodded.

"He cares for you, I know. He always admired you. Were you quite straight with me in the old days, Frankie? Didn't you endeavour just a little to weaken his allegiance towards me and draw him towards yourself?"

"No, Mary, never." At times her voice sank, I only caught a part of what ensued. "Showed admiration—checked him—honour to you," was all I heard.

Mary gazed quietly at her friend.

"I didn't think he was so weak," she said, "but——" she paused. "Make him happy, Frankie—and I'll forgive you—both."

My cousin was very silent as we drove home.

Lady Gaveston was waiting in the drawing-room, evidently armed for a fray.

"I gather you're marrying Lord Kinross," she remarked with a sniff—she had known it for some days.

"Yes."

"When is the wedding to take place?"

"I think in the Autumn," said Frankie deprecatingly.

"I shall not be here," said Lady Gaveston with a snap.

"You're going to leave me?"

"At the conclusion of the season, as we first arranged. I'll carry out my contract—no more."

"But Lady Gaveston——"

Milady stopped her with a gesture. "Keep your persuasions, Frances—you'll want them later. I am proof against cajolery: I stay till the beginning of August, then—" she paused, "our paths divide."

She retired with the honours of war. Frankie sank listlessly into a chair.

"I wish it were over," she said at last. "My marriage, I mean. It's such a long time coming, and—and—it's cost so much already. Even now something may happen to stop it."

"What is there to fear?"

She sighed. "Not very much, it's true. Hope won't try any more conclusions with me. Sir John"—she paused a break in her voice. "He would never wish to hurt me," she said softly.

"And Toby?"

"Oh, I've settled him. He's not likely to give any further trouble. He won't come here again just yet, I've asked him not to."

But in that she was mistaken. That evening Toby came.

Frankie and Lord Kinross had gone to the theatre. I was sitting in the drawing-room alone when he walked in.

"Where's Frankie?" he said quickly.

"Out. She's gone to the theatre, and won't be back till quite late—what is it, Toby, anything wrong?"

"I'm in trouble—awful trouble." He looked ghastly.

"Frankie's deceived me," he went on. "Not an unusual thing," and he sneered. But this time"—he paused. "She lied about the bill," he said, "lied horribly. She told me it would not fall due for three months, and by that time she would have the money."

"Well, isn't it so?"

"No, I met Nathan, the money-lender, in the Strand this afternoon. He stopped me and asked quite casually if my uncle were in England.

"'It's a matter of business,' he said. 'Sir Edward backed a bill for your friend, Mrs. Norton, at six weeks. I daresay you know about it? It falls due in three days' time. The lady's sure not to have the money, so we shall have to drop upon Sir Edward.'

"He looked at me in a strange, scrutinising way, Cynthia. I'm sure he suspects the signature is not genuine. I asked him to communicate with me before he wrote to my uncle, as Mrs. Norton was my friend, and he promised that he would. Meantime, there's only three days in which to get the money."

"Frankie hasn't a penny," I gasped, "and Fluffy is away."

"It must be got somehow," he said grimly. "I'll try my best but I've small hopes. I'll see you again to-morrow. Remember, Cynthia, if the money is not paid the bill will be presented to my uncle. He will repudiate the signature, and——. But I'll not live to be disgraced. I've courage yet to put a bullet through me. I mean it. If we can't get the money I shall shoot myself—you'll tell her."

He left abruptly, but all the night his white face and hunted-looking eyes haunted me.

"I've courage yet to put a bullet through me."

The words rang in my ears. It must not be, it should not be! But there were only three days left. Three days of grace!

(The first events of those terrible three days will be recorded next Tuesday.)

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A SISTER'S SACRIFICE.

Telling of the Love of a Crippled Girl.

"WHEN is it to be, Minnie?"

Rob Durand looked lovingly into the eyes of the girl who stood before him, and the expressive orbs drooped under the ardent gaze. Rob's heart beat with exquisite joy as he noticed this, but he attributed the movement to the wrong cause.

"I do not know, Rob," faltered Minnie Penton.

Her heart was contracted with fear; she had dreaded this moment—yes, dreaded the moment when Rob Durand, the man whom she loved with all her soul, should ask her to name the happy day! She called it the "happy day," and yet dreaded to be asked to name it! Her train of thought was interrupted by Rob.

"Then I must fix it, if you will not," he declared, placing his palms against her soft cheeks and raising her head until he could look again into those sweet eyes. The frightened expression which he detected in them perplexed him.

"Oh, Rob," she burst forth at length, "it cannot be yet! Not for a long time perhaps. I could not leave Jennie!"

"But who said——" He was about to ask why she thought that marrying him meant leaving Jennie, but she interrupted him hastily.

"I could not leave her; she would die if deprived of my care. I have tended her since mother died, and have devoted myself to making her happy, poor crippled Jennie! I could not allow one more drop of pain to be added to a cup of suffering that is now almost full to overflowing. No, Rob, it cannot be!"

"You are running on wildly, Minnie dear," he expostulated with loving kindness. "I do not propose to separate you and your invalid sister; whatever could have caused such a notion to enter your pretty head? She will live with us, and she shall not know that any change has taken place, so far as care of her is concerned. She will be as happy as it is possible to make such an invalid. I will see to that!"

She knew that he would do all he said; she had never thought otherwise, and she was ashamed of having tried to mislead him. Yet how could she tell him the truth? She must put him off in another way. Oh, why had Rob and she fallen in love?

"It cannot be, Rob dear. While my sister lives it is impossible for me to marry you. I know that you would do everything to make her happy, but she would not be happy if she knew that I loved another better than I love her. She has had my undivided love and attention so long that it would be a cruel blow to her, a blow that my love will not permit me to inflict. We must wait—wait while she lives!"

"But that is absurd, Minnie!" cried Rob impatiently. "Why, we might have to wait a lifetime! I am willing to wait a year if you like, but not indefinitely. Come, within the space of twelve months, you can gradually accustom her to the idea. Even twelve months seems a lifetime!"

He laughed gaily, bent and kissed her, feeling convinced that he had overcome all her scruples. His temper began to get slightly the better of him, ardent lover as he was, when she shook her head.

"It cannot be, Rob! I know that we may have to wait years, but we must wait. While Jennie lives, I cannot marry. I will not keep you bound; you are free, if you desire it. Let us be friends——"

"Friends!" he echoed scornfully. "I love you, and cannot be a mere friend. If you love me," he continued bitterly, "as you have told me, then you will marry me. I cannot wait.'

"I do love you, Rob," she said simply, crowding back the tears, "but I cannot marry you while Jennie lives. Don't be hard. Do I not suffer as well?"

"If you love me, you could not ask me to wait indefinitely," he replied savagely. "So that is the love you have to give me, and it is for this that I have hovered near you, unhappy during every moment that I could not be with you! Friends! No, it cannot be; you must be my wife or a stranger."

"No, no, Rob!" The words were wrung from her. "Do not go away! Stay with us, for the sake of the days we have passed together and can yet have together! Stay near me, and let us be good friends!"

"No! I should like to remain near you, for happiness will be an impossibility for me while out of sight of your dear face; but if you have no greater love for me than that, it is best that I should go!"

He turned on his heel with his usual impetuosity and strode away. She tried to call him back, but she could not utter a sound. With a moan of anguish she sank to the ground and sobbed convulsively.

Why had such a cruel fate been forced upon her? Rob had gone away, angry with unsatisfied love, forgetting that she, too, was suffering. No, not forgetting, but unaware of it. She excused him even in her sorrow. He did not know the truth; how could she tell him? How could she let him know that she could not marry him while Jennie lived because the marriage would be a death blow to her sister?

Poor Jennie had conceived a consuming passion for handsome Rob Durand, ever since the day when he had lifted her from the awkward position into which she had fallen while Minnie had gone in search of flowers for the invalid. Rob Durand had been struck with the beauty of the cripple, and he was just as much moved by the loveliness and charm of the elder sister when she returned two or three minutes later and warmly thanked him. After that, Rob Durand had called under the pretext of inquiring after the health of the invalid, but in reality to obtain the chance of a talk with Minnie. So they had drifted into love, Rob and Minnie, and the latter had suddenly awakened to the knowledge that her deformed sister had fallen in love with Rob Durand.

Minnie's grief exhausted itself, leaving a dull pain at her heart. She went to her own room to efface the marks of tears and then made her way to the chamber where the deformed girl was lying in bed.

"Has Rob been to-day, Minnie?" she asked querulously. "My Rob! I call him mine, because I love him, although I fear that he cannot love me. You don't think me foolish, I know, Minnie. It is so sweet to think of him as mine! Has he been this evening? I did not hear his voice."

Bright red spots on her cheeks indicated the intensity of her feelings. Minnie smoothed the lovely hair from the forehead of the invalid and smiled indulgently.

"Yes, he came and stayed for a little while, dear. Are you comfortable?"

It was strange to see such beautiful features in a cripple. A fall during childhood had marred the making of a beautiful woman, and she was more like a lovely child in appearance than a woman of full age, as she lay thus in bed.

"I wish I had been up to-day!" sighed the invalid. "I

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should have liked to see him. My Rob! I know that he can never be really mine, but it is pleasant to say so to myself and to you, Minnie. What did he say?"

"Oh, that he was sorry that you were not up, and so on."

The cripple was quieted until the morrow, but Minnie was uneasy on Jennie's account. Suppose Rob Durand kept his word and went away? What would Jennie say?

The next day came and began to wane, but Rob Durand did not appear. Minnie, fulfilling some necessary errands, learnt that he had left by the 2.45 train for Paris, where his sister was living, and her heart sank. He was gone! He had thought her cruel, but oh! how cruel he was to her!

"Why has not Rob been to-day?" asked Jennie fretfully.

"He has been kept away unavoidably, I suppose, dear," replied Minnie, trying to maintain her composure.

"That is the first time he has stayed away since he helped me. I don't understand it."

The next day passed, and still no Rob. Jennie was excited and irritable.

"Where is he, Minnie? Why is there no sign from him?" She glanced sharply at her sister, and Minnie's countenance betrayed her. "You know why he is not here and you have not told me!" she added vehemently.

Minnie saw that it was useless to keep up the deception; she must soon learn that Rob had left England.

"I have heard that he has gone to Paris, dear," she explained. She dared not trust herself to say more.

"Why has he gone? Minnie, I insist on knowing. Why. Ah!"—as Minnie burst into tears—"I understand. You have taken him from me! You have stolen his love from me! This is your devotion to me! You pretend to care for me, and you take advantage of your health and strength, your upright figure, to take my lover from me!"

"Jennie, don't, don't!" cried Minnie appealingly. She feared the result of this paroxysm for her sister as well as for herself.

Jennie's cheeks were burning now. She raised herself in the bed and pointed a finger with withering rage and contempt at Minnie ere she fell back in a swoon.

There was no mistaking the fact that Jennie's violent outburst had done irreparable mischief to her frail body. She changed visibly and would speak to Minnie only when occasion demanded. Minnie, in the greatest alarm, summoned a well-known physician, who confirmed her suspicions that Jennie's days were numbered. She saw the sister, the poor creature who had been deprived of the pleasure of living and condemned to constant suffering, fading from this world. Could anything save her? Only one thing offered the merest chance, and she resolved to do it. She hurriedly scribbled a letter to Rob Durand at his sister's address and posted it.

But a week went by and he came not. Jennie's attitude had changed somewhat; the softening influence that comes when the end is near was working silently. Minnie would sit by her for hours at a time, without a word from Jennie, but now and then there was a look in the eyes of the deformed Jennie that indicated a change of sentiment.

One afternoon, more than a week after the posting of the letter, Minnie was keeping her vigil by Jennie's bedside when the latter opened her eyes suddenly and cried:

"Rob is here!"

Minnie gazed at her in deep anguish; the end was surely near, and her sister had actually mistaken her for Rob! She arose to bend over the bed, but started as the door opened and Rob Durand stepped into the room.

"He has come to me!" cried Jennie, holding out a weak, emaciated arm and hand. Rob took it and glanced at Minnie.

"I understand it all now," he said softly, taking her by the hand that was disengaged.

"Yes, yes!" said Jennie weakly. "I do not mind; it is well. You are mine while I live and——"

Her eyes closed. Minnie took her sister's other hand, and thus they stood till she passed away from her life of pain.

"I did not get your letter for five days," said Rob, "for I had gone to St. Petersburg, and it was sent on. I returned at once. Can you forgive me?"

G. E. Lingen.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 2. — Mixed influences over the next year may be expected by those whose birthdays occur to-day. Unexpected changes and sickness. Have a care with servants.

Girls will find love affairs very interesting, but little confidence should be given.

The day is evil for most matters; guard against chills and mishap.

A child born to-day will be ingenious, and fortunate in the employ of others.

September 3.—An active and fairly prosperous year may be expected by to-day's children. Good for young people, clerks and teachers. Landlords and farmers benefit.

Rather quiet for love affairs.

The day is good to deal in property, sign papers, and engage servants.

A child born here will be very clever, have an active brain, and sharp wit. Will do well in business.

September 4.—Good for health, business, and finances. Some trouble over home affairs and children.

Young girls will have anxiety over lovers, but if born from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. they will become engaged, or marry.

The day is good for buying and selling, especially near noon.

A child born this day will be fortunate in most matters, and should be in a business of its own.

September 5.—The positions for those who celebrate birthdays to-day are more fortunate for girls. Aged people will find it a dull time and need care with the health.

Girls receive attentions, and, if engaged, they marry.

The day is good for changes; buying wearing apparel, and for pleasure. Beware of colds and mishap on the water.

A child born to-day will be fond of change and pleasure. Will lack self-confidence and should keep in employ.

September 6.—The year will bring many annoyances and not much good fortune in business. Guard against loss and accident.

Love affairs make little progress, and girls should beware of quarrels.

A bad day for letter-writing, signing agreements, speculating, and visiting friends.

A child born here will be improvident, sharp-tempered, and headstrong.

September 7.—A fortunate year for business; farmers, builders, and aged people are favoured. Ask favours and buy property.

Girls born near 1 a.m. and 8 p.m. receive attentions from elderly men.

A child born here will be fortunate in business; the mind will be practical, painstaking, and ingenious.

September 8.—An active year, but sickness or trouble in domestic circle. Beware of quarrelling and mishap.

Young girls will find love affairs go wrong, chiefly through third parties.

The day is good to deal with military men, visit doctors and push business. Evil for pleasure and marriage.

A child born here will be quick, headstrong and fond of pleasure. Should be in employ of others.

Asturel.

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THE LOVER'S LEAP.

Telling of a Mistake and its Sequel.

CHAPTER I.
The Introduction.

MAIDEN aunts are a peculiar dispensation. As a rule they have money, hang out hopes to a nephew or niece, wear glasses and fronts, and are rigid and requiring. They lean to theology, denounce the theatre, and view the mildest Havana as a spark from the hottest regions of profundity. Such, at all events, is my experience of the race. I had two of them. One departed, and my expected legacy merged in the second, thus binding me over to a tighter and direr state of bondage.

My aunt Euphrosyne Gorges possessed something besides her high-sounding name to raise her to the ranks of the aristocracy. She was nearly six feet high, had white tapering hands, was a twenty-fourth cousin of Lord Tatterham, and owned a lofty house in Merrion Square, Dublin.

It was here that I was admitted to play my part as slave, sycophant, and strategist, and I contrived to enact it as skilfully as I could, having only a Castle-Rackrent sort of habitation to fall back upon in the far west, if I fell out with my present prospects.

I am afraid, after all, I was a bad hypocrite. My cousin Bob Bright had ten times my gifts of diplomacy. For me, I was apt to be remorseful if I humbugged too unblushingly; and this combination of scrupulousness and subtilty was a distasteful admixture, tending to an uncomfortable state of the internal regions. Far better to have been thorough-going, like my cousin Bob. The elements for success are a cool, clever brain, unflinching courage, and untold audacity.

It may be thought that this rule can scarcely extend to the fairer sex, with whom softness and sweetness are so enticingly associated; but here affectation steps in adroitly on the scene. They can *show* tenderness, by all means; never feel it. A woman of this genius passes far in the race her delicate, shrinking sister, who blushes away her chances in life, and seldom rises to the occasion when a line has to be cast or a prize landed.

I may as well admit at once that I had not succeeded very well up to this point in one line of tactics; I made no way with the ladies. Now my aunt Euphrosyne cherished a firm theory that young men should marry and "settle" early. I was wise enough to indorse all her views when laid down to me tract-wise; but here acquiescence ended; I could not put them into practice.

One morning in the dog days my aunt had held forth to me rather warmly on some subject from behind the tea-urn, and I felt almost suffocating. I escaped as soon as possible into the garden at the back of the house. It was but a narrow strip of territory, and few flowers of the more delicate species flourished within its imprisonment. Nevertheless my aunt had made the most of it. A trellis-work entwined with roses and jasmine surmounted the walls, there was a grass plat in the centre, and a border at either side of a gravel walk well stocked with sweet peas and hardy annuals. Her crowning piece, however, was a large, waving plant which stood near an arbour in the far corner. She called it "The Pampas, Palustris, Parnassus Grass." The name I thought long, and the plant likewise. Its tall stalks, with their light puffy heads, seemed always in the way; and I didn't like it somehow. At the same time I was wholly guiltless of any premeditation as to the catastrophe which was at hand.

At this hour my aunt Euphrosyne was generally absorbed in some matutinal consultations with the cook, and I thought myself safe. I drew surreptitiously from my pocket a small embrowned case. My nerves wanted soothing and the insects smothering. Let the cost be what it would, I must have a cigar. Scarcely, however, was a light vesta ignited when a step was on the gravel walk, and with an expletive, into which I fear the word "blazes" intruded, I flung the match hurriedly away.

"George!" said my aunt, approaching, "I've some news for you."

She held an open letter in her hand, and I turned to her attentively.

"You have heard me speak of Miss Lufleigh?" she pursued —"Letitia Eliza Lufleigh—she is a sweet, serious girl, and has just come into a fortune, willed to her by her godmother—twelve thousand pounds. George, she's the wife for you! I will give you an introduction, and you can make her acquaintance at once. I have shown some kindness to Dr. Lufleigh's family before now, and I expect they will receive you as a son——"

"And heir?" I interposed.

"Don't be flippant, sir. This is a serious matter. Matrimony is an important step in life. Miss Letitia is young, handsome, and clever. In a word, she has wit, wealth, and worth. Can you ask anything more? Tell me that, sir, I beg of you." And my aunt, warm with her oration, bent enthusiastically towards her pet Pampas.

"Isn't it grand?" she murmured, and stroked it affectionately. "It's getting golden, gorgeous, quite red towards the centre," and she peered closer into its depths. "But, gracious! what's that?" and with a bound she was back to me. "Good heavens, it's on fire!"

"Sunstroke! fireflies! spontaneous combustion!" I cried incoherently.

"George, you've done it!" said my aunt, in that awful tone which seemed to thrill everything like an earthquake. "How could you? How dare you?"

"I—I didn't—I didn't mean it," I finished up, for she had seen the fib on my face. "I was lighting a match to scatter the midges. I suppose it fell somehow; the place is as dry as tinder, and——"

"Oh you wretch! And you stand there, and my Pampy in flames! The seat will catch in a moment, the house, the whole square!"

The picture was so terrible that I sprang madly to the pump, and calling all hands to aid we had presently drenched arbour, walls, walks, shrubs, and, lucklessly, my aunt herself, with a

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primeval deluge of water. Everything being either burnt or soaked, I fled to the house. My aunt's cap was done for, a new dress, and any remnant of reason the first shock had spared.

It is scarcely necessary to explain that after this escapade, I fell meekly into all Miss Euphrosyne's views respecting the matrimonial investment, and the very next day was dispatched ardently on my mission.

Dr. Lufleigh was a country doctor residing in a southern part of Kilkenny. He was the owner of two daughters, who both had the reputation of beauties. It was the elder who had become now the lucky legatee of the bequest from a deceased godmother.

"Mind," exclaimed my aunt as I left, "mind, George, that it's Letitia—not Lucy. Be clear and clever. Don't forget!"

Turning my head towards my aunt's excited face, I sang out, in a tone as eager and emphatic as her own, "Lucy, did you say? Yes, aunt, all right; never fear."

The cab was off before I could catch her distracted ejaculation; but I saw her hands uplifted despairingly, and plumed myself on the fright I had put her into. She was not, however, to be outdone by me in this way, or baffled in having the last word. As we stopped presently at the station on the line a telegram was put into my hands. It contained the single sentence, in a clear, clerkly caligraphy that made me redden instinctively—

"*Letitia*, you stupid, not Lucy, for your life."

An omnibus was at the station which was my final destination, the town itself being some little distance off. Just as we were starting a delay came. There was a rush at the doorstep, the conductor gave way, and a pile of wet garments tumbled in amongst us. There was no possible room for another occupant; but before any of us had recovered from the showerbath which the dripping garment had dispensed, a lady had taken her place—or rather *my* place—and I sprang into an awkward position, between sitting and standing, to escape receiving her in my arms. A thick-set gentleman in the corner, against whom I was thrown, was round on me in a second. He was in a muffler, and saw nothing beyond his immediate vicinage.

"What are you about, sir?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by this violence? You had better go outside, or I will call the conductor."

"I beg your pardon. This lady——" I began.

"No lady is encroaching," he broke in sharply. "It is you, sir, who are aggressive. It is you who have no seat."

It was scarcely unnatural that my prejudice should be pretty strong by this time against the cause of the commotion. I decided at once on her appearance. She was large, bony, and stern-featured, and with that disagreeable, self-asserting air which marks the spinster of a certain age, who, with no other prop to cling to, is tenacious of her "woman's rights."

A glance to one side revealed, however, an unexpected vision. The lady was blushingly young, undeniably pretty, and unmistakably shy. It was no doubt in a bashful rush that she had deposited herself anywhere to escape the awkwardness of claiming or soliciting a seat. She had evidently not forgotten my implied reproach for this procedure.

The instant the omnibus stopped she started up, drew her dress and wrappings as far as possible out of my way, and, rejecting my proffered assistance, sprang from the vehicle, disappearing rapidly down a side street.

It had been arranged that I was to put up, in the first instance, at the village inn, with the ostensible object of looking out for some fishing in the neighbourhood, and call casually with my ticket of introduction on the doctor's family. I had a rod and tackle with me, but it was a line of another kind that was to claim the most careful manipulation at my hands; so at all events had decreed my aunt Euphrosyne.

Alighting now at the only hotel the place boasted of, I ordered something in the way of refreshment; and in the interim of awaiting its appearance I set myself to an inspection of a photograph of Letitia Lufleigh with which my aunt had armed me. Viewed critically, I could not but acknowledge that the features were good; but they had a corrective in a point which I decidedly objected to; the complexion was sombre. A dark-visaged wife! I had no fancy for the possession.

My meditations having run in this vein, I made inquiries as to the locality of Dr. Lufleigh's abode, set forth, and speedily found myself ringing at his door.

I had decided beforehand that this gentleman was short, round, and rubicund; and when I saw a tall, thin man, with a squeezed-looking face and a sallow, sad complexion, I half felt that I had made some mistake.

"Dr. Lufleigh?" I murmured.

A reply in the affirmative brought aunt Euphrosyne's letter from the inner recesses of my pocket, and my companion, adjusting a pair of spectacles, read it slowly. The signature finally acted as a talisman on him. The muscles of his lean features relaxed, and he extended his hand.

"The nephew of Miss Gorges is truly welcome to my humble hearth," he said, in a tone as full as could constitutionally be managed,

Here was I, struggling ignominiously on the ground, and, worse than all, pinning the stately Letitia to the same posture of humiliation.

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"Pray come into the drawing-room, and let me introduce you to the young ladies."

The instant I entered this apartment I started. The first face I saw was that of my bashful neighbour in the omnibus. She seemed to be in a chronic state of blushes, for her cheeks suffused all over now as the doctor announced her as "my daughter Lucy."

Lucy; but where was Letitia? The question was asked aloud almost as my thought framed it.

"What has become of Letitia?" demanded the doctor. "I thought she was here with you."

"So she was a moment since. I will call her, papa"; and Miss Lucy, glad to escape from my scrutiny, glided to the door.

I foreboded what the elder would be like. I had the dark colouring of her father before me; and the unerring truth of photography flashed, instantaneous as its own impressions, on my mind. I was so nervous till Letitia entered that the doctor seemed each instant about to feel my pulse, and I thought there would infallibly be a move to the surgery.

At last she appeared. Something in her aspect sent a quiver through me. She was handsome, no doubt, and I could trace a far-off likeness to the photograph. But the features looked larger and heavier in reality; and though the dull tinge I had so timorously apprehended was softened more into paleness than sallowness, there was enough, even in this milder hue, to rouse a feeling of aversion.

What between the stiffness of the one sister and the shyness of the other, my projected system of dispatch fell rather to the ground on the present occasion.

I did not take leave, however, without having received an invitation to a small party for the following evening; and, afloat on a more lively scene, possibly my own courage might rise, and the charms of the old and the coy young ladies expand in proportion.

CHAPTER II.
The Entanglement.

The hour for the entertainment having arrived, I put in a punctual appearance, and was ushered at once into a room gay with flowers and gaslight. Possibly I looked nervous again, for the doctor's hand was extended with a pulse-feeling gesture as he came forward to receive me. It changed, however, into something of a reassuring shake as he noted my brilliant shirt studs with the Gorges' arms inwrought in jewels. My eye rested quickly upon Letitia. She was in pale pink with white ruches, Lucy in a washed-out muslin; so there could be no hesitancy as to the object of devotion. I was at the side of the elder sister in a moment; I hovered about her like a shadow; she couldn't lay down her bouquet for one second but I had seized upon it, and was presenting it to her with a gracious grimace.

Miss Lufleigh was not without her womanly instincts, and she relaxed insensibly in the presence of such definite attentions. A deepening tinge came gradually into her cheeks, and this was enough to fire me at once.

"Charming colour pink is!" I exclaimed ecstatically, and ventured a nearer approach to the folds of her dress.

"Do you think so?" said Letitia calmly. "I suppose it becomes pale people."

"Pale! The most lovely tint of blush; just the hue I admire; anything deeper is so glaring and gaudy. I would not change it for worlds."

This rhapsody was without any definite subject, as may be seen, but Miss Lufleigh must have understood whereto it tended.

She rose suddenly and half averted her head.

"Do you dance?" she asked, looking towards an adjacent room where the preparations for this entertainment were commencing.

"Yes, certainly, gladly, delightedly, when I can secure a —a——"

"A partner in pink?" said Letitia, with a laugh.

The sound grated on me. What did she mean by the query? Did it bode mockery or encouragement? However that might be, I was not to be deterred now; and accepting the words as a promise I claimed her hand for the opening waltz. I was soon spinning about with her in its bewildering mazes.

"Enchanting! entrancing! ravishing! Let us pause for one second!" I exclaimed suddenly.

Certainly Miss Lufleigh had great physical powers, whatever else she might possess. We had been whirling and whirling as if we were to go on for ever, till I drew up at last with a gasp. My partner scanned me contemptuously.

"You don't care for waltzing?" she inquired, with her calm, dull face as cool as a cucumber.

"Oh yes, of all things; it is my passion!" And more mindful of the jeopardised "twelve thousand" than any considerations of exactitude, I seized her in the same breath round the waist, and before I knew where I was, or certainly where she was, I had dashed her violently against an unoffending couple, had knocked them over, ourselves after them, and had trampled her pink silk in a crushed mass beneath my feet..

I couldn't get up. Something horrible came over me. It was a sense of suffocating shame; and whenever I attempted a movement an awful rending sound—heartrending is the truer term—warned me that I was hopelessly entangled in the lower flounce of her dress.

What was I to do? The other gentleman and young lady were on their feet again in a moment, and here was I struggling ignominiously on the ground, and, worse than all, pinning the stately Letitia to the same posture of humiliation.

How we were rescued, I never knew. I had a dim remembrance of a glittering blade flashing before my eyes, of making one faint appeal for mercy, and of feeling in the same moment the too tight link that bound me to my partner suddenly severed, while I stumbled to my feet, a new-made knight of the garter, with some dozen yards of pink-and-white fabric wound about my knee. The evening came to an end for me then and there. But fortunately the politeness of my host spared me any too marked mortification. He pronounced the room too small for dancing, that he knew all along that it would be foolish and hazardous; and refreshments being ordered in, the party shortly afterwards broke up.

The pursuit of Letitia Lufleigh became a thing of terror to me after that night. But the very next post brought me such a peremptory threatening letter from my aunt that I determined at all hazards to go through with the business, to rush at a proposal which I felt sure would be rejected, and thus, by my ready obedience, secure myself at least in the elder lady's good graces, however disgracefully I might fail with the younger.

CHAPTER III.
The Proposal.

Mild weather seemed to have had a balmy influence on all tempers and temperaments. My own feelings of irritation calmed and Miss Lufleigh's stateliness softened off into graciousness. I had seen her once or twice since the evening of the waltz; and now on a lovely midsummer day I found her alone in the little drawing-room. Could anything be more propitious? She seemed to be seated here awaiting some such confession as that which hovered on my lips. However that might be, I would put her to the test now; and seating myself

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by her side I clutched convulsively at my watch-chain, as if some means of inspiration or support might be gained thereby.

Miss Lufleigh remained silent, and I began to hate her for her impassibility.

"What a lovely, enticing day!" I essayed at last; "weather which no one can resist. I am most favoured to find you in."

"I was just going out," said Miss Lufleigh composedly.

"Don't—don't go!" I broke in with a sort of wildness, and then I stopped. I ought, of course, to have dashed ahead now, but I could not.

"I thought you pronounced the day tempting," she began, as the pause lasted.

"Yes, yes, for those—for any who are free—heart-free."

"I don't understand you," she interposed.

I might have re-echoed Marlow's exclamation with a vengeance. I went on, however, in desperation.

"No wonder! How could you? Words can't, won't, express a meaning like mine. They fade and fail at a moment like this. But, dearest Miss Lufleigh, loveliest Miss Lufleigh, you must have seen and known for yourself what I feel. Be pitiful then, be——"

At last I had moved her from her composure. A sudden flush rushed into her cheeks.

"Do you know what you are saying?" she interrupted in agitation. "Do you know whom you are addressing?"

"An angel," I began.

"Mr. Gorges, if this is a jest, it is an intolerable one. Such conduct is ungentlemanlike, unpardonable."

"How? Why? Wherefore?" I broke out vehemently. "With love like mine, who can hide it? Don't turn from me! Listen to me, believe me, receive me! Be my wife, Miss Lufleigh—be my one treasured wife!"

The repudiation of all Mormon views in the emphatic "one" was scarcely called for in an adjuration of the kind. Letitia, however, had alighted most happily on another expression, which seemed to give an electric shock to her system. At the word "wife" all her features relaxed, her eyes fell till the lashes had covered them with a bewitching veil of shyness. The magic colouring of emotion grew deeper on cheek and lip, and, incited by such unexpected tokens, I followed the prescribed formula, and clasped her suddenly in my arms.

I sprang about midway up the platform, descried a small door, pushed violently against it, and, as it yielded to forcible pressure, I fell almost head foremost into a deep, cavernous abyss.

"Be mine!" I breathed; "be mine for ever! Say it, whisper it, to your George!"

She did whisper something then. It was a little gulping "Yes," and, while I trembled at all it bound me to, another murmur came from her lips. "We must ask my uncle, dearest. You will speak to him!"

"Your uncle? who's he?" I cried.

"Dr. Lufleigh, my one guardian now—the generous parent of a poor orphan!" and there was a faint sound of the stirring of some filial emotion.

"What! are not you Miss Lufleigh? his eldest, his Letitia?"

"Only her cousin and namesake," was the reply. "She is away from home now, arranging matters about her legacy."

"Good gracious!" I gasped, and with a sudden and startling rapidity I sprang up, flung my fair burden to the other end of the sofa, and stood over her in a pose of horror, my hands half clenched, my eyes glaring, and terror and menace in my looks.

My aunt's face was before me, her fierce denunciatory tones rang in my ear, and it is no wonder if they reacted mesmerically upon my motions.

"What do you mean? George, George, Mr. Gorges, what can you mean?" was the exclamation of Letitia, and I felt her grasping at my arm.

"I'm—I'm ruined!" I had all but said; but catching up the word ere I was wholly disgraced, I substituted the first that came.

"I'm too, too happy!" I cried; "this rapture is driving me mad!" and I struck my forehead wildly.

"Calm yourself, collect yourself, dearest!" and Letitia, seizing me in a more tender clasp, drew me again upon the couch. The luckiest rap that ever resounded upon a knocker released me from the fatal position. The embarrassment of a lover naturally seized me at the sound. I sprang from the sofa, gained the hall, drew back the bolt of the door, and the next instant was in full collision with Dr. Lufleigh, who stood mildly on the doorstep.

A muttered word of apology, some dim hint of a coming explanation, and I had shot past him and sped like a madman along the street.

CHAPTER IV.
The Leap.

Certainly no innocent, unoffending fellow was ever placed in a position more critical than mine. I was trapped as neatly

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as any mere tuft-hunter, and yet I could not accuse myself of the propensity. Beyond the policy of pleasing my aunt, there had been nothing mercenary in my motives. I didn't want to be married, I didn't aspire to that fragile article "a jewel of a wife," however rich might be her setting.

I could never return to my aunt bearing my present tale of misadventure, and if I did not take some prompt step I was entangled for ever. It was plain to me now that Miss Letitia had been as cunning as cool, and had but rebuffed me at moments by her frigid demeanour to draw me on the more recklessly in the end.

At the first symptom of seriousness on my part she had snatched at the reality with an avidity which showed me how tight a tussle it would take to relax her grasp. I had gained my room in the hotel, and for nearly an hour I paced it up and down in a state of growing distraction, till suddenly, fleet as a meteor-ray, a thought flashed on me. I snatched at pen and ink, drew a sheet of paper from a blotter on the table, and in a second was seated before the latter, dashing off an epistle which I felt would be all the more natural and effective the greater the dispatch used in its penmanship. I was charmed with three blots which fell on the sheet at the wind up. I scarcely read it over; the more distracted and disconnected the effusion the better, and it should have no benefit from later amendment.

It was one of those wild, desolating farewells which bespeak utter despair of the mind, and blank hopelessness as to any brighter change for the future. Returning to my secret longing for a refusal, I determined now that I had been refused, and upbraided the fair Letitia.

Never, I said, could I claim a forced affection. Her manner had too plainly shown what her feelings were, and mine were such that a renewal of my suit was impossible under such circumstances. I must at once and for ever tear myself from her presence and her vicinity; and then, rising boldly to a climax, I alluded darkly to an instant departure for some deadly region of destruction; and signed myself, with the most emphatic and irrevocable of dashes, "Yours, *in* death, George Gorges."

If she thought me mad after perusal of this missive what did it matter? I was at least free, and that point gained I could have courage to face any later embarrassments.

The letter duly sealed and addressed, I inquired about the trains on the adjacent line of railway; and finding that one left in twenty minutes, I made arrangements for immediate departure. I determined to walk to the station to get rid of company or questioning in the omnibus, and before starting I left my letter with the waiter, with emphatic instructions to have it delivered safely at the doctor's house.

Once on my route my spirits rose. I recalled with a thrill of delight the mad manner in which I had rushed at Dr. Lufleigh, nearly knocking him over.

With the vision of a like exit before him, he must certainly confirm my own assertion that I was a rejected lover. Nothing but this state (or the insanity, which was an equally convenient attack) could explain such distracted conduct. I absolutely chuckled to myself at the remembrance; and my ruminations were so engrossing that it was not till a sharp whistle broke on my ear that I recalled that the conclusive step of escape was not yet accomplished.

Then I saw to my horror that I had taken the wrong turning, that the station was on another road, that the omnibus had already arrived there, and that the engine of the train was even now dashing up to the platform. There was nothing for it but a steeplechase across hedges and ditches; and finally, when I came up panting to my destination, I was greeted by a second shrill shriek, and received the simultaneous shock of beholding the train puffing off at its best speed. Determined to foster the impression of my eccentricity, I rushed in wildly to the stationmaster, upbraided him furiously for my own stupidity, and only cooled down on the assurance that another train bound city-wards was due in an hour's time. Nothing could persuade me to emerge from the station in the interim; not even that tempting balminess of the air to which I had so touchingly alluded on a recent occasion. I sat down doggedly at the window of the one small waiting-room, watching the blank platform with the eye of a Cerberus, ready to make a pounce on the first locomotive that appeared, and take it by storm, in revenge for my late discomfiture. The driver of the omnibus had no doubt seen my escapade across the fields, and thus, should inquiries be made for me at the hotel, he would be prepared with information as to its vain result.

What if Letitia, vexed or vengeful, should send her uncle in search of me? A qualm came over me at the thought. Passionate impatience supervened, and up I got, and began such loud pacings and stampings in my small retreat that the stationmaster must have prayed as devoutly as myself for the providential arrival of the train.

An hour passed—the wretched conveyance was late. What business had it to pause anywhere but here? I would have a report drawn up to the directors; and full of my new grievance I emerged from confinement and strutted out, puffing and wrathful, towards the ticket office. The man at once popped in his head with a frightened gesture. But if I could not confront him by menacing looks, at least he should not shut out my stormy accents. These were rising ever higher and higher when an awful sight stopped them.

It was the face of Letitia in the doorway, backed up by that of her uncle. I dashed like a maniac in the opposite direction. This brought me right out on the platform—the bare, blank platform, without a sign of a train, without a haven of refuge in sight! I sprang about midway up, descried a small closed door, pushed violently against it, and as it yielded to the forcible pressure, my hat rolled off behind, and I fell almost head foremost into a deep cavernous abyss. Something sharp and shiny rose up around me and above me. It was pile upon pile of black glittering coal.

Bruised rather and battered, I scrambled like a sweep to my feet, and had just strength left to bound frantically towards the door, and hold it by the lock.

In the same instant a bell rang, I caught the whistle of the engine, and knew that the train was up. Loud above its noise rose another. It was the voice of Letitia Lufleigh.

"Where is he? Gracious, where is he gone to?"

"He's mad, wherever he is," said the doctor calmly.

"Stark, staring mad," echoed the station-master.

"But what has become of him? Do look, do think," cried the lady distractedly. "Oh good heavens, he's under the train!"

"No, no, Letitia."

"But he is, I say! I see his hat!"

In the terrible commotion that ensued a hope flashed upon me. Everyone had rushed to the far end of the carriages. I could hear them screaming, poking, and gesticulating. Slowly I released my grasp of the coal-hole door, peered out, and made one spring across the platform. The luggage van was directly in front. In a second I was in it, and had crept behind a big box. Safe here, I listened breathlessly for the start. Even though my crushed remains lay under the wheels, the train couldn't wait for ever for their recovery. The guard plainly was of my opinion. My heart gave a bound of delight as I heard him banging to the doors, though his cool remark at the moment would have made my blood curdle under less happy circumstances.

"Smashed to smithereens! Gone as clean as a cockle! Not a hair of him left but the hat!"

A tip to this feeling functionary ended my difficulties on my arrival in town; and a letter to my aunt, when I had gained the further haven of London, cut short any trouble with her. She indorsed, at last, all the latter steps of my career with the stamp of approval, and recommended a prolongation of the continental tour which I had promptly mapped out for myself.

On my return to her hospitable hearth, never again did the name of Letitia or Lucy vex my hearing. Her cautious consideration extended to other young ladies as well; and charmed at this release from matrimonial intermeddling, I have felt that credit rather than censure must ever attach to the dashing valour of my "lover's leap."

L. Thompson.

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A Little Mistake.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Jackson. "What a stupid fellow that jeweller is!" "How so?" inquired his friend. "Why, I told him the other day that I wanted engraved on the engagement ring the letters 'from A. to Z.'—'from Arthur to Zenobia,' you know—and the idiot went to work and put in the whole alphabet!"

Breaking Point.

A man may think he adores a woman; but his love is put to a terrible strain when she asks him to button her shoes with a hair-pin.

Then Inspiration Vanished.

She: "Henry!" He: "Horrors! Don't interrupt this inspiration. I am——" She: "My dear, I only wanted to say that you have dipped your pen into the coffee."

Very Unkind.

Dora: "That reminds me, I must inquire from my *fiancé* what business he is in." Clara: "I judge by the look of the ring he gave you he must be a glazier."

Why She Felt Miserable.

"Mrs. Guggins is feelin' mighty miserable." "You don't say so! I thought she was lookin' in splendid health." "Yes, that's just it. She's feelin' so well that she can't think of nothin' to take patent medicines for, an' she jest sits and reads the advertisements and pines."

Plenty of Business.

"Much business this morning?" said the chemist to his new assistant as he entered the shop, which was also a post-office. "Yes, sir," replied the youth. "I have had a busy morning of it. There have been six women in to look at the directory, and I've obliged eight people with postage stamps, besides changing a sovereign."

Method in His Madness.

Wife (fondly): "Do you remember, John, how you used of an evening to hold my hand—my sweet little roseleaf you used to call it, you funny boy—for hours and hours? How silly my old boy used to be." Old boy (grumpily): "Nonsense, Jane; don't be stupid. I was always practical and business like. I did that just to keep you from the piano."

The Twins' Names.

Mrs. M'Wiggins: "Oh, Archibald, I have such good news for you. I have finally selected names for our twin boys. The chosen appellations seemed to come to me as a sort of inspiration." Mr. M'Wiggins: "Thank goodness! Our days of constant searching after cognomens and our nights of sleepless anxiety are over. What are you going to call the babies?" Mrs. M'Wiggins: "Pete and Repeat." Mr. M'Wiggins: "Happy inspiration!"

A Brilliant Conversationalist.

Richard: "What kind of girl is Miss Zephyr? Is she much of a conversationalist?" Thomas: "That's where she excels. I played whist with her last evening, and if it had not been for her there would hardly have been any conversation at all. She was the life of the table. She always had something appropriate to say, such as 'What's trumps?' 'Is it my play?' 'Oh, dear! I didn't know it was yours.' and numerous other equally impertinent remarks. Oh, yes; she's a splendid conversationalist."

From a Gushing Pen.

Edna: "What do you suppose makes Tom write such awfully gushing letters?" Kate: "Oh, I suppose he uses a fountain pen."

Angelic Praise.

Miss Budd (to famous pianist): "That music was truly divine, monsieur." Monsieur: "Ah, mam'selle, zat is indeed praise; for who but an angel would know divine music!"

A Convenient Gift.

Uncle: "And what are you going to give your little sister for a birthday present?" "I'm going to ask father to get her a football, and then I'll show her how to play."

Forcing a Smile.

"Dear me!" cried mamma, "what *is* the baby crying for?" "He's cross with me, mamma," said Mollie. "I was trying to make him smile with the glove-stretcher."

Poor Papa.

Little Ethel: "Mamma, what does it rain for?" Mrs. DeHomely: "To make the trees and grass and everything grow pretty." Little Ethel: "Then why doesn't it rain on papa?"

Sure to Stay.

Vokes: "We have at last secured a cook who will stay with us." Carson: "Nonsense!" Vokes: "Not at all; I took her on the recommendation of the policeman on the beat."

The Tune that Haunted.

First Bald Head: "That's a beautiful piece the orchestra is playing." Second Bald Head: "Ah, it is one that will always haunt me." "Why?" "It is the only one my daughter knows."

Overheard in a Crowd Watching a Balloon.

Mrs. Harris: "How do they make the balloon go up?" Mrs. Gamp: "They toss some sand out to be sure." Mrs. Harris: "And what do they do when they want to come down?" Mrs. Gamp: "They put some more in, of course."

Pressed to Confess.

"You told me you didn't like smoke, George," she said reproachfully. "Who says I do?" he asked, indignantly. "Nobody; but I distinctly felt several cigars being crushed into dust in your vest pocket when you hugged me that time." And he owned up.

Saving them up.

"If you think I'm such a conceited ass, why do you have anything to do with me? Why keep all my letters to you, for instance?" "My dear boy, I am keeping those letters to show you five years from now, just to convince you that you are what I say you are."

Not What She Wanted.

Clerk: "Here is a letter from that actress. She is willing to give us the testimonial, but she wants us to write her first giving definite information about terms." Successful Soap Man: "Terms?—yes. I wonder what we ought to charge her for publishing her name in connection with our soap. It's a big advertisement for her."

Very Much Alive.

"Papa," said a beautiful girl, as the old gentleman came in late, "did you notice the dead body of a young man in the yard?" "Why, no; what's the matter?" "I refused young Mr. Paperware to-night, and from the hopeless, despairing look upon his face when he staggered from the house, I fear he may have killed himself." "Well, I'm glad you refused him," said the old man, spitefully; "he has just beaten me five times at billiards."

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A Woman's Trust.

A Charming Little Tale of a Misunderstanding.

"The woman who gives herself to a man, who consents to be his wife, should feel the most absolute trust in him; otherwise she should not consent to share life with him!" declared Lilian Barham decisively.

"You are older than I, and more determined in character," sighed Alice Deed, her friend. "I always was timid, and I sometimes think that I shall never be bold and trusting enough to accept a man, supposing that a man ever cares enough for me to make a proposal. It must be nice to have such trust in anyone, and you must certainly have great faith in your lover, and be very fond of him, to face the smiles of your friends, who have not failed to remind you of your strongly-expressed vows of single-blessedness!"

Lilian Barham laughed happily.

"I *do* love Mark Amberley!" she said warmly. "It seems strange to me that he should have so thoroughly taken possession of my heart as to sweep away all my resolves so completely. That, Alice, shows the power of love! I *do* trust him——"

She was about to continue, but she stopped abruptly, and, to cover the sudden break in her sentence, she made pretence of having heard a knock at the door. A chill had fallen on her heart, for she realised a something which she had not been able to define. She had no time to analyse her feelings while Alice Deed was with her, for that feather-brained young lady kept up a constant chatter on topics connected with weddings, but after Alice's departure she sat still in a cosy arm-chair and tried to examine her heart.

While she was with Mark Amberley, she was in an ecstasy of joy; she felt bound up in him; she felt that she could not live without him. He was all in all, and she trusted him, as she had told Alice that a woman ought to trust her future husband, unreservedly, entirely. Yet——. A slight flush overspread her face as she remembered her recent expression of opinion. It was true; when she was away from him, there came over her a chill of—doubt! Yes, it was doubt; she realised it for the first time. She had wondered if this undefined sentiment were doubt, and she shuddered.

"It is foolish and unjustified!" she assured herself. "A punishment on me for my long defiance of the little god of love," she added with a laugh.

She went upstairs and looked at the trousseau and at the presents from her relatives and friends, as a kind of antidote to the poison, and then there came a letter from him and her chilly doubt vanished once more and she was unspeakably happy.

The following evening she was to meet Mark Amberley at a ball given by the Dowager Lady Amsden at her magnificent residence in Grosvenor Place, and she looked forward to the dances she would have with him. He was a superb dancer and she was so fond of dancing! Very few men nowadays can claim to be good dancers, and she was usually vexed with two or three of her partners whenever she went to a ball. The pity of it was that she could not have him to herself all the time!

The evening came and the first part of the programme was over. She had been obliged to give some dances to others, and Mark, finding that he had to yield his loved one to another for the last dance before the interval, resolved to have a quiet rest in a secluded corner. He left Lilian talking to her hostess, in order that it might not appear that he was monopolising her, and walked listlessly away.

It was with a mingled sentiment of vexation and satisfaction that Lilian awoke to the fact that her partner for the dance had not come to claim her; she was not sorry to sit out that dance, but it was vexing to be left and not to have the chance of sitting it out with Mark. Lady Amsden apologised, and would have sent her younger son in search of the truant, but Lilian interposed.

"I would prefer to sit out this dance, really!" she expostulated vigorously.

"It is unpardonable!" asserted Lady Amsden.

Her son, a young fellow of eighteen, was about to offer himself as a partner, but on hearing Lilian say that she would prefer to sit out the dance, he drew back. Lilian Barham's beauty and hauteur inspired him with something like dread.

After a few seconds, Lady Amsden was called to another part of the ball-room, and Lilian quietly moved off to a spot where she would not be so much within the view of the dancers. She had wandered from the ball-room, her thoughts busy with her lover, when she was startled by the sound of his voice. It came from the other side of some tall plants used for decoration purposes.

She did not make any movement towards him because she heard another voice and because of the words Mark had uttered.

"To tell you the plain truth, my dear fellow," Mark had said, and his tone struck her as light, almost flippant, "I think it is rather a bad bargain, and I would draw out of it if I could see a reasonable excuse."

"But a pledge is a pledge, Mark," said the other voice. "I can't see how you can back out of the engagement now. And I think you are wrong, too. More than one man I know would like to have your chance."

"Oh, I could get out of it for that very reason! If others would be glad of the chance——. I really don't see why I should stick to the engagement if I can do better; I don't take such things as seriously as you seem to do, Archie. And I believe that I can do better, in spite of what you and others may think! No offence, old fellow; I merely wish to say that I was off my head when I ran into that affair. But I can't see a decent excuse, confound it!"

The next words were lost to her, and then the man called Archie spoke.

"I am very sorry to hear you say it. It's so near the wedding. only four days. What . . . . . Miss Barham?"

The intermediate words of the sentence were lost to her, but she strained her ears now to catch her lover's reply to the question.

"Oh, I'll undertake to arrange matters with her! I don't think that *she* will be much upset by my backing out of the engagement! Why should she? 'There are as good fish in the sea, etc.' You know the proverb."

"You take things too lightly, Mark."

"And you take them too seriously, Archie! Look here, I take you along with me and ask her, before you, if she has any objection to my backing out of the engagement! Come on now!"

Lilian Barham's cheeks were flaming and her heart was beating at a great rate. The indignity of it! Scoffing at what should be the most sacred of ties, and speaking of backing out of it in front of a third party! He was so confident too!

Did he think a woman of her nature would treat such a matter lightly, without consideration, and be as ready as he was to throw it off and laugh at what the world might say? He could do better! She had great difficulty in repressing the tears of humiliation that were ready to surge to her eyes.

But he should find no obstacle to breaking the engagement

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if he so desired; she would relieve him of the necessity of hunting about for a reasonable excuse! She passed swiftly from the back of the tall plants and stood before them.

"Miss Barham!" exclaimed Archie in surprise.

"Lilian!" cried Mark equally astonished, rising from his chair.

Both men showed their surprise very plainly in their faces, as they gazed at the hotly-flushed cheeks and flashing eyes of the girl.

"Allow me to return this ring, Mr. Amberley!" said Lilian freezingly, taking off the engagement ring and holding it out to him.

"Lilian!" he exclaimed again, his cheeks paling.

"Miss Barham in future, if you please, Mr. Amberley!"

"But what does this mean?" he asked in perplexity. "I think there is some mistake."

"There is no mistake," she replied in the same icy tone. "I was an unwitting eavesdropper, and I desire to spare you the necessity of finding a decent excuse to enable you to back out of your engagement with me, as you vulgarly phrased it just now!"

"Lilian, I did not say that!" he declared hotly.

This contradiction, this transparent attempt to shield himself by a falsehood enraged her; it was adding insult to injury. She would have flung the ring at him had not his companion, a man of about thirty-five, stepped forward.

"Miss Barham, there is some terrible mistake, believe me!" he said earnestly. "Mark was not talking of his engagement with you at all. It was unfortunate that the word 'engagement' was used, but that is my fault; I am rather fond of using the word in connection with business undertakings or arrangements. I assure you most solemnly that the conversation which you have overheard concerns a splendid investment!"

Lilian Barham glanced from one man to the other in doubt; Archie was so earnest that she felt bound to believe what he had said.

"But why was I mentioned?"

"Lilian, I do not remember the exact words used by either of us, but I certainly never said anything about backing out of my engagement with you!" explained her lover, speaking in a manner that carried conviction with it. "I have engaged myself for a certain sum in an investment which Archie thinks is a splendid chance, but which I am now inclined to regard with less favour than I did when I went in for it. Moreover, I want the money, which is rather a lot, for an unexpected turn of my father's business—which is a very large one, as you know—has absorbed all the ready money he intended for me, and so I feel that I want the money I have so recently invested. When I told Archie that, he looked grave and said something about 'What will be thought by Miss Barham?' I forget exactly what he said. It's all very simple, Lilian, and there is no mystery about it. I feel inclined to kick Archie for his habit of using such words as 'engagement' and 'pledge' in such commonplace matters!"

"It's all perfectly true, Miss Barham," said Archie in confirmation.

Lilian's cheeks paled and she trembled. This was her trust! She sank to a chair and covered her face with her hands.

Archie discreetly withdrew.

"Don't cry, my darling!" whispered Mark. "It's all our fault!"

"No, no! I ought to have trusted you!" sobbed Lilian. "And instead, I—I——"

"Yes, you must trust me," said Mark, taking her hands from her face so that he could kiss the sweet lips, "and in future you will!"

"Fully and completely, Mark!" said the girl in a low voice. "I have learnt my lesson!"

She kept her word. She kept her engagement, as Archie would have said. And there is not a happier woman to-day than Mrs. Mark Amberley.

L. Payne.

Your Editor Chats.

I HAVE a big scheme coming along in which a number of Gramophones will be offered as prizes. Many of my readers will not, perhaps, feel very interested at this announcement, because they do not know exactly what a Gramophone is, or how it works. I will therefore tell you something about it.

A Gramophone is an instrument which exactly reproduces any sound which may be made. If you sing into it, or cough, or sneeze, or shout, the instrument will reproduce these sounds just as they were made. Therefore you can readily understand that it is possible for you to hear songs and musical pieces sung and played by the finest singers and bands of the day, without troubling to go out of your own parlour.

All you have to do is to take a flat disc and place it under the recorder. As the disc revolves, so the sounds come out of a trumpet, just as realistically as if the music were being sung or played for the first time. It is such instruments as this that we shall offer as prizes to our readers, and full particulars of the big scheme will appear next week.

OUR NEW SERIAL.

AND now as regards the new serial story which will start in a few weeks' time.

I think I may safely say that no story of such power and interest has ever appeared in SHORT STORIES. It is written by an author who has a great reputation for romance of this nature, but who will be introduced to readers of S. S. for the first time. It is a story in which the chief characters are depicted with great vividness, and their doings arouse your sympathy, your admiration, and your affection.

A NOVEL SERIES.

SHORT STORIES is essentially a paper of which the contents must, in conformity with the title, consist of narratives. Despite this, I am always receiving letters from readers who suggest that an article on a given subject would not be amiss.

There are so many subjects in which readers of SHORT STORIES are interested, which might quite well be dealt with in an article, that I am sometimes sorely tempted to create a precedent, and publish matter in other than narrative form. For example, everyone is interested in the subject: "SHOULD A MAN GIVE UP BACHELOR PURSUITS WHEN HE MARRIES?" An article on this matter in SHORT STORIES is, however, out of the question. But I have thought of a better way of discussing the point, and that is in the shape of a short, complete story.

I have selected a dozen problems of general interest, and have had short stories written on each—that is to say—each story is so produced as to form a solution of the problem. This is an entirely new way of dealing with facts, and I feel sure that readers will appreciate the innovation. I am always trying to keep SHORT STORIES well ahead of all its rivals, and I think you will not consider me egotistical when I say that I feel we are still in front. **Your Editor.**

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As it Really Was.

A Pathetic Tale of Theatrical Life.

Sylvette, the "clever and beautiful chanteuse," was singing and the patrons of the fashionable vaudeville theatre, where for two weeks her name would continue to appear on the outside in electric lights, were agreeably conscious of the fact that she was in exceptionally fine voice and spirits to-night.

Sylvette had the best place on the programme, which means that she appeared at an hour neither too early, when people were arriving, nor too late, when the audience were weary and tired to hold.

All the lesser vaudeville lights had twinkled and disappeared from the horizon when the peerless Sylvette had arrived to dress for her act. And now this bright particular star could shine in all her glory, supreme in the consciousness of unrivalled splendour.

Sylvette's songs were of a various nature. She changed from a pathetic love ballad to a French ditty of the most sparkling, not to say naughty, character, and from this returned in a flash to face her delighted admirers with the latest and most approved "coon song," into which she threw herself with the utmost abandon.

Yes, Sylvette was astonishingly versatile. The array of grinning youths on the front row were unanimous in their expressions of approval, all agreeing that she was splendid, which in their vernacular signified the very climax of appreciation.

The baldheads used their opera-glasses in open admiration; not with more vigilance, however, than did the women of the audience, although their interest was of not so friendly a nature.

Two of them, seated in a box at the singer's left, seemed especially interested in that dainty individual.

"You can see the make-up so distinctly from here," whispered the younger of the two.

"Of course you can. Oh, she's heavily made up, that's plain enough. I wonder if she's as pretty off the stage?"

"No, she can't be. Who wouldn't be pretty under the same circumstances? And then, think of her gowns!"

"Just imagine, Marie," said the older one, "the frivolity of such a life, vanity, vanity, nothing but vanity. Her nature must essentially be extremely inferior to permit of her singing those horrid songs with such apparent enjoyment. How dreadful to live always a life of superficiality and sham—never to have a noble incentive! Oh, it's pitiful, it's shameful."

Marie's eyes were on the stage. She was but vaguely conscious of her aunt's words. "It is sad," she murmured absently. Sylvette was bowing for the last time, with a flashing of eyes and teeth and a swirl of rose-lined, ruffled skirts.

"There—she's off. What comes next? Let's see your programme, auntie."

"I can't forget that girl," pursued the older woman, still in her pitying mood. "Such an existence is saddening to think of. Life to her is nothing but a gay bubble, and when it bursts—what then?"

But Marie replied rather peevishly as she yawned behind her fan, "I'm sure, auntie, I don't know."

When Sylvette left the stage, she hurried at once to her dressing-room, ignoring the crowd of envious performers and admiring stage hands, who, according to their custom, had gathered to watch her "turn."

Her maid speedily divested her of the rosy finery which but a few moments ago had shimmered in the glare of the footlights.

A swift application of cold cream removed the roses from her cheeks, the fascinating shadows from her eyes—and in an incredibly short time she was ready for the smart tailor-made gown that Nancy was holding in readiness for her.

When dressed for the street Sylvette was still an attractive young woman, though her face was graver by far than anyone would have thought possible who had seen her on the stage.

An unopened letter, addressed in a woman's handwriting, lay on the table. As Sylvette caught it up with her gloves and purse the gravity of her face increased all at once to an expression almost of pain. She had carried the letter about with her all day, since its arrival at the hotel that morning, and had not yet found opportunity to read it—or was it that she shrank from opening it?

Dismissing Nancy as soon as she reached the hotel, she went straight to her room.

Even after her wraps were laid aside and she was settled in her comfortable armchair she still waited, handling the letter deliberately and musing over it, but making no attempt to open it.

For some time she meditated, her head thrown back against the cushion, her eyes half-closed. Finally she straightened up with a sharp sigh and resolutely tore the letter from its envelope. This is what she read:

"My dear daughter Sylvia,—Why do you not write oftener? Messages from you are the bright spots in our monotonous existence. You are so generous, dear, to send us so many lovely things—but it is your letters we want! We know but little of your plans—your life. You make such vague mention of your musical work. You say you have engagements in various parts of London, and we know you must be well paid, for you are constantly remembering us with some lovely gift. Be careful, dear, not to try yourself too far. Don't think we ever forget what we owe to you. I pray that my daughter is the same sweet Sylvia she always was, and that she is happy. Won't your engagements ever allow you to come home? We could get you up a concert at the opera-house, as we used to in the old days. We simply must see you again, dear. You will write more fully, won't you, daughter Sylvia? Your loving "Mother."

Sylvette folded the letter carefully, her eyes staring vacantly before her. Suddenly she rose abruptly and went to the writing-desk in the corner, took out her diary, sat down and wrote: "Mother has asked again why I don't tell them all about myself. I suppose I shall have to tell them some time, but not now! No, it's out of the question. They would never understand."

She underlined the last sentence and again rose, pacing the room restlessly. What a strange mood she was in to-night.

Returning again to the desk she caught up the diary and began to turn its pages, reading them as she stood. A look of absorbed interest replaced the pained distress of her face. At length she sat down in the armchair and read on and on, as if she were reading the story of another person.

April 10th.

"I am almost discouraged; I do not know where to turn. There seems to be nothing for me here. I have sung, recited and played at concerts and similar functions, hoping that they would lead to something better. But I'm just as far from securing a paying engagement as ever. Mrs. Mills hints at my returning home. I dare say I have imposed upon her hospitality—but what can I do? I can't go home; I promised them I would succeed and send them relief and I will do it.

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Oh, the complications at home; I dare not think of them. Poor mother, how does she stand it? No, no, I won't give up. I will find something."

"April 25th.

"Letter from mother. Alice is ill—poor little thing. I know why—it's from wearing those old thin shoes. My heart aches and aches. I know mother is keeping a great deal from me. I know what desperate straits they are in. Oh, I must find something. I will make one more mighty effort. Dear God, help me and show me the way."

"May 3rd.

"At last help has come. It is far below my ideal, but it means bread and butter and money for the folks. Once I would have scorned the offer, now I grasp at it as a dying man grasps a straw. I am going into vaudeville. I have had a trial and the manager offers me one week, with promise of the entire season if I succeed. The idea is popular now—quite the fad, and pays better than anything else, they say. Mrs. Mills says I ought to be thankful enough to get such an opportunity; that it is not to be sneered at. Mrs. Mills is a Londoner and she understands, but I can't let them at home know about it. In that little country town they would not look at it as Mrs. Mills does, I'm sure. No, it would never do; but I can send them money! Thank Heaven for this relief."

"May 30th.

"What a rush I've been in! No time for a diary. Well, I made a pretty fair success and they have promised me the season, but how the money flies! Photographs, costumes, everything! Couldn't send anything home for two weeks, but oh, how proud and happy I was when I did send £20. Now, if I can just keep booked up I'll be all right. Luckily the vaudeville houses keep open all summer, so I need not be idle during the hot weather."

"June 15th.

"The work is awfully hard—three performances a day. I'm losing flesh somewhat, but then it means money for them. How overjoyed they were when relief came! But why will they ask so many questions? They want to know all about my work. Well, there's no use thinking of that. They could not understand. The work is honest and I shall always keep myself from the real theatrical life. It need never hurt me."

"August 6th.

"I can't imagine what is the trouble. The agents don't give me any more engagements. I haven't a single one in prospect and I have been idle now for two weeks. What can it mean?"

"September 18th.

"I've trudged and trudged about this city in the heat until my feet ache with weariness. Every theatre is booked up. I haven't sent home money for a month. Oh, what shall I do. I'm nearly desperate again."

"October 3rd.

"At last I understand. A well-meaning manager has opened my eyes to my deficiencies. He says my act is tame—needs more ginger. With a coon song or two and a high kick thrown in. He says I must not wear long dresses. He advises me to get up some *chic*, dashing costume if I mean to make a real success in this business. He says my appearance and stage bearing are attractive enough (in fact he said a number of nice things about my looks), but that I need these other things to please the general public. He tells me I would command twice as much salary and play only twice a day, but how can I ever sing those songs and how can I—oh, I can't—I simply can't——"

"October 19th.

"Yes, yes, I can do it; I can do anything to save Alice. Mother writes that she has grown so delicate the doctor insists that she must have a change of climate during the coming winter. He urges them to send her—says it is absolutely necessary to her recovery. She has been ill ever since that first time mother wrote. Poor, patient little thing! Will I sing coon songs, French songs, and wear abbreviated skirts? Yes, I'm nerved up to it at last. I know I can do it and make a success. Applause shall be mine! For applause means money and money means a change of climate for dear Alice!"

"December 1st.

"Well, it is all done. I am a full-fledged variety actress of the most pronounced type. They have sent Alice away. At last the great stress is over."

Sylvette let the diary slip into her lap and read no more. After awhile she rose wearily to prepare for bed. As she did so she noticed a folded bit of paper on the floor, and picking it up, discovered it to be a postscript to her mother's letter.

"P. S.—I don't want to worry you, Sylvie, but Alice is not improving as we had hoped. Try not to worry, dear.

"MOTHER."

Sylvette slept wretchedly that night.

She had to force her spirits next day to appear as scintillant as was expected of the radiant Sylvette. A heavy hand seemed clutching at her throat, but she flung off the influence. She wrote home at once and sent a letter brimful of tenderness to Alice. She began to feel hopeful once more.

On the last night of her engagement, however, she grew restless and foreboding again. She was feverishly alert when night came. It was almost time for her turn and Nancy was adding a finishing touch to the jaunty costume when a telegram was brought in by one of the stage hands.

"For me?" questioned Sylvette. Again that hand clutching her throat. She opened the telegram slowly, in a dazed way, and stood reading the words over and over:

"Alice died this morning. Come at once.—MOTHER."

Sylvette stared dumbly.

"What is it, Miss Sylvette? Lord! look at her lips!"

She took the pencil and blank and wrote mechanically:

"Coming to-night. SYLVIE."

A loud rap sounded on the door and an alarmed voice—"Sylvette! Sylvette! your turn!"

She faced the stage manager with the same dazed, staring eyes.

"Must I go on? My sister is dead!" Her voice sounded strange to her, like that of another person.

"Great Scott! My dear girl, I can't let you off now, it's too late! They're waiting for you. The Thornley Sisters disappointed us, too—one of 'em's ill. I am sorry, but——"

Sylvette was on the stage, smiling, sparkling. Her hands were like ice. There was a roaring in her ears, but the habit of affected buoyancy asserted itself. She sang, she joked. Her eyes flashed with even more than their accustomed brilliancy. Her audience thought her amazingly spontaneous to-night. Gay, winning, rollicking, she captivated them as never before. It was all a nightmare to her. The rapturous applause, the sea of upturned faces. "Alice is dead; Alice is dead!" The words kept beating on her brain till it seemed the tension would snap.

When she reached the shelter of her dressing room she did not cry out or swoon. She heard as in a dream voices murmuring: "Poor Sylvette; it's very sad about your little sister." "Can't we help you?" "How brave you are."

Sylvette was flinging her things on a chair while Nancy packed the trunk. "Hurry, Nancy," she cried. One thing she would avoid. In a few turns a quartette would sing "The Lost Chord." She must get away before then. She would not, could not, endure it.

She was dumbly conscious that the stage manager spoke to her kindly and that the others pressed her hand and offered their sympathy.

She found herself gazing at the plump envelope just brought round from the box office.

"It will help pay"—she shuddered—"the expenses."

Suddenly a sweet, piercing tenor arose:

"Seated one day at the organ——"

"Oh, Nancy—come—I can't stand that! Quick—my bag—good-bye——"

Her voice broke. She was gone.

"It will do her good to cry," said the others pityingly.

Out in the box Marie and her aunt were sitting.

"The gay Sylvette was gayer than ever, wasn't she?" remarked the girl.

"And just as superficial. What a life! I wonder she never tires of it!"

Angela Morgan.

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OUR . . THRILLING SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By Henry Farmer.

Mr. Penworthy at Gurlston Bay.

When Esther asked that Mr. Penworthy might be sent for, it had seemed strange to her father; but he was only too willing to do anything that would please her. He himself had taken a great fancy to the homely little horticultural specialist. He knew him to be a great favourite with Esther. He had telegraphed for him; but Crump had already been on his way to Gurlston Bay. When the news of the series of catastrophes reached him, the accident to Esther, and her subsequent precarious state, and the recapture of Scarsdale, the little man had been distressed beyond description. He believed himself to be in a position to offer Esther more consolation than even her father could, and that the time had come to reveal his true identity to the banker. Benny Beard was under surveillance in London; Tom Jackson and Fred Wilton could be relied upon to look after Railton; Revelle had been so seriously damaged in his encounter with Scarsdale that he had been unable to leave Gurlston Bay, and was lying disabled at Winter's house.

Crump's heart had brought him to Gurlston Bay; at the same time, from a professional point of view, everything was in apple-pie order.

"Shall I be allowed to see Miss Mansfield at once?" he questioned.

"Yes," answered the banker.

"And then, Mr. Mansfield, I should like to have a confidential talk with you on a matter of very great importance."

The banker looked at him curiously, questioningly. Crump shook his head.

"It will be a long talk, and I am most anxious to see Miss Mansfield. Poor young lady, it has been very grievous; but it must be a source of some consolation to her to know that, though Alec Scarsdale has gone back to prison, he lives; and you, Mr. Mansfield, though I understand that you look upon him as a guilty person, yet you yourself must be filled with feelings of gratitude to the man, convict though he be, who saved your child's life!"

It was known now who the man was who had fallen from the cliff.

"He has brought untold misery into our lives," whispered the banker hoarsely, "but, for my child's sake, I would give worlds to be able to believe, to have proof of his innocence! I would——"

He stopped abruptly, as if suddenly realising that Mr. Penworthy, landscape gardener, was hardly the person with whom to discuss these matters; again he eyed the little man curiously. The situation was altogether incongruous.

"Mr. Mansfield," said the little man, reading his thoughts, "I shall explain presently. You will understand me better then. For some time past I have been sailing under false colours."

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you this much now. I rely upon you to keep my communication absolutely secret. My real name is Crump. At one time I was connected with the detective staff at Scotland Yard."

John Mansfield stared at him with a look of blank amazement.

"Crump? Not *the* Crump?"

The little man nodded his head, and looked as if the emphasis on the "the" had embarrassed him.

"I have imposed upon you, Mr. Mansfield. I will tell you why briefly, more fully when we have our talk proper. Chance brought me to Warham on the morning following the robbery at your house. Even then I had my doubts about Alec Scarsdale's guilt. I was present at his trial, and witnessed an incident that convinced me of his innocence; though an old man, and very rusty, I felt that, this being my conviction, it was my duty to endeavour to prove Scarsdale's innocence. I did not take you into my confidence then because, rightly or wrongly, I believed that nothing would have shaken your belief in his guilt. You would have looked upon me as keeping open a wound in your daughter's heart that you wished to heal. You would have opposed me, tooth and nail. You would have been a source of great inconvenience to my plans. I am only revealing myself to you now because that dear, brave young lady, your daughter, is seriously ill, and I venture to believe that her mental anguish would be greatly relieved if she knew that her father believed in the innocence of the man she loves, and though I am not at present in a position to prove his innocence in a court of law—though, God willing, I hope to be before very long—I have gathered enough together by now to convince you, I trust, of his innocence."

"I would give worlds to believe it," whispered the banker hoarsely, "but——"

"There will be no 'but' presently," said Crump quietly. "You will please treat what has passed between us as absolutely confidential; and now might I be permitted to see Miss Mansfield?"

"Prove Alec Scarsdale's innocence," whispered the banker, his belief in his guilt shaken now by an indescribable something about the little man's manner, "and if you come to me and ask of me half my——"

"The only thing that I shall ask you for, Mr. Mansfield," said Crump, with a shadowy smile, "is an invitation to your daughter's wedding! And I may be asking you for that sooner than you anticipate!"

For before Crump had left Warham, a piece of information anent the future movements of Mr. Revelle and Mr. Faversham had reached him indirectly through Fred, and he was anticipating something happening. Mr. Seaton Revelle's creditors were beginning to clamour for money. Railton had heard from his master to the effect that he would be shortly returning to The Firs; also that Mr. Faversham was to be expected.

"And now, Mr. Mansfield, would you please lead the way. I shall not stay with Miss Mansfield long. After that we can talk more fully!"

"Esther," said John Mansfield, as he entered the darkened bedroom, "I have brought someone to see you—Mr. Penworthy!"

A faint cry came from the bed. Crump, his lips quivering a little, advanced very quietly, and, taking the thin hand outstretched to him, pressed it reverently to his lips; then, still holding the hand, he sat down beside the bed. For a few moments there was complete silence. Esther's big eyes were fastened on the homely face; but the little man could find no words. He seemed incapable of doing anything but swallow. The banker stood near the door, his arms folded, his head down-bent. Was it possible that he had been wrong? Had

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OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

Our Powerful Serial.

he been helping to persecute an innocent man? If he had done so, it had been in all good faith; but his conscience was torturing him how! And his child! If it were so, then he had persecuted her also.

"We must be thankful," whispered Crump unsteadily, breaking the silence at last, "that you are going to get well; we must be thankful that he—he is living and is well. I have inquired personally after him. He is well. And, for the rest, my dear child, we must put our trust in God! I venture to believe that we are nearer our goal than we were. I believe that, before long, we shall be in a position to strike. I am beginning to be very hopeful!"

He had not dwelt on all the horrors that she had been through, he had not even asked her how she was feeling; but this was not from any lack of sympathy. He wished to instil hope. He wished to cheer, not depress. He had spoken as though he took it for granted that she was on the high-road to recovery; yet not brusquely, nor with a there's-nothing-much-the-matter-with-you manner; but rather with an exceeding gentleness and tenderness. And what was not spoken in words, was conveyed by the pressure of the hand that held hers.

"I have told your father the truth about myself," he continued, "and presently we are going to have a long talk!"

Esther's eyes dilated. They sought the silent figure standing near the door.

"Does he believe now," she whispered, "that——"

"He will do after our talk. He will be altogether on our side."

Since that night of the robbery, there had been a little barrier between Esther and her father, raised up by his belief in Scarsdale's guilt, a barrier that had prevented perfect understanding, and had been a cause of secret heartache; but Crump was on the eve of removing it. He was about to open John Mansfield's eyes as to the real character of Mr. Seaton Revelle, the man on whose evidence Scarsdale had been convicted, the man whom the banker had hoped, one day, to welcome as his son-in-law.

Crump remained some little time longer, whispering words of hope and comfort; then, with a final pressure of Esther's hand, and a "God bless you," he quietly left the room with the banker.

More than an hour passed before the door of Esther's room was opened, and John Mansfield re-entered. He moved quickly to his daughter's bed. Stooping down, he gathered her up in his arms.

"Esther," he breathed out chokingly, "forgive me! My eyes have been opened. I can never forgive myself. I have wronged you, I have wronged him. I believe now that Alec is innocent!"

"Oh, father, father! Thank God for this!"

The kindly-faced little man, already on his way to the railway station, had brought this about. He had broken down the barrier that had stood between father and daughter, and brought them together again. He had revealed to John Mansfield the true characters of Revelle and his friend, Mr. Faversham.

"I feel," said the little man to himself, "comparatively speaking, quite light-hearted again, now that barrier has been swept away. Within the next few days my foreign correspondence ought to begin to bear fruit. I can't help thinking that we are on the eve of something happening at Warham."

A well-dressed young man, who had been advancing along the road from the opposite direction, had stopped suddenly in front of Crump.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, "you've managed to change yourself considerably; but if you're not Mr. Crump, I'll eat my hat!"

People are eating less.

At the annual meeting of a well-known Refreshment House Company the other day, it was officially reported that the number of people served had not decreased, but the quantity of food consumed had. This means so much direct loss of strength; for as soon as the food supply is diminished the bodily strength declines. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans will keep an edge on your appetite during summer's trying weather, and will prevent you from being "run down" or becoming a sufferer from indigestion's evils. Mrs. Mary A. Dodsworth, of Shipyard Row, Selby, says: "I could take very little food because of indigestion. Meat was to me uneatable. Eggs caused me pain. Bread, tea, bacon, and ordinary articles of diet made me so sick that I hated to touch food at all. The result was I became so weak and jaded that I was hardly able to walk. To-day I am in robust health; and the difference in me is due solely to Bile Beans. I am a living example of what vast changes they can work."

Every man and woman who has no appetite should remember Mrs. Dodsworth. Bile Beans are sold by all chemists at one and three-half-pence or two and nine. Anæmia, debility, "summer-fag," constipation, headache, and all female ailments disappear wherever they are introduced.

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Crump, it will be remembered, on taking upon himself the character of Penworthy, had grown a beard and moustache that had very much altered his personal appearance, and had concealed the bald spot on his head, memento of a fierce struggle with a burglar, under a *toupet*.

The little man showed no signs of either embarrassment or annoyance at being thus suddenly unmasked.

"And you," he said, "are Mr. Gerald Phipps. How do you do! I hope I see you well. Dear me! The last time I saw you was when you came over from Dunnavon Chase with Sir Reginald Stanley to visit my little place. Perhaps you remember how beautiful my roses were looking?"

Gerald Phipps was shaking the little man's hand heartily. After his retirement Crump had settled down in a charming cottage on the estate of a Sir Reginald Stanley, a gentleman whose story has been told elsewhere, and who owed much to the detective.

"Mr. Crump," went on the young 'Varsity man, "last time I saw you, you assured me that you had done your last day's work. And yet I don't mind betting a fiver that you've some business on hand at this very moment!"

"I don't deny the impeachment, Mr. Phipps!"

Crump produced one of his "Penworthy" cards, and handed it to him.

"That is my present name and occupation. I can rely upon you not to give me away!"

"Trust me! And, look here! You're the last person in the world that I expected to knock across; but the man of all other that I wanted to. Mr. Crump, I've got a case for you!"

Crump glanced at his watch. He had a train to catch.

"You'll pardon me, Mr. Phipps, but I am rather pressed for time, and the matter that I am at present engaged upon demands all my attention; but if you should feel inclined to walk along the road with me, I should be very glad to hear the details of this case of yours, and give you my advice, such as it is!"

"It's a most serious business," said Phipps excitedly, "my hands have been tied, are tied now, in fact; but with you it's a different matter. You won't give me away, I know. I—I believe in Scarsdale's innocence. In fact—er—I did my best to help him to get clear, and if this got known, don't you see, I should stand a big chance of being run in!"

Crump's eyes had brightened.

"But this is what I'm coming to. You've read about that ghastly accident on the cliff—how the man who saved Miss Mansfield's life proved to be Scarsdale. In the papers it was stated that the rope broke. It was wrong. The rope was cut through. And I've got a piece of that rope. Scarsdale gave it to me!"

"Mr. Phipps," said Crump sharply, "this meeting with you is providentially opportune. Your business is my business. The train will go without me. I will thank you for the fullest details!"

It was late evening when Crump reached Warham. He carried with him a piece of rope that had been round Scarsdale's waist when he went over the cliff, the cleanly cut strands of which pointed to the fact that it had been severed by a knife.

The little man's face wore a singularly stern expression.

"I could prove attempted murder now, I believe. I hope to prove a charge of murder against him, the vile scoundrel! These things can wait. I want first to prove beyond doubt Scarsdale's innocence. So much happiness depends on this! And, I may be wrong, but I do believe that something is about to happen very shortly!"

THE DATE IS FIXED.

WHEN Seaton Rovelle stepped into the closed brougham that awaited him outside Warham Station, the marks put upon him by Alec Scarsdale in that short, fierce struggle had not altogether subsided. For two days he had remained in his bedroom at Gurlston Bay. Again and again he had surveyed his battered features in the mirror, and every time blasphemy had escaped his lips. He hated anything approaching personal disfigurement. The sight of his own face had pained him more than his aching, bruised limbs. He had sent Scarsdale back to prison again, but even this only acted as a partial salve to his wounded self-esteem. He could not bear to be beaten or humiliated. And Scarsdale had thrashed him! He was conscious, too, that the goal was receding from him. He knew now that he had misunderstood Esther; that never for one moment, when he had been flattering himself that he was making progress, had Scarsdale been absent from her mind. And now there was another worry. Creditors were clamouring for money. He had posed as a rich man. He must stop his creditors' mouths. Let the news get abroad, and it meant social ruin; and he clung to the position into which he had raised himself.

Railton admitted him to The Firs. A quick glance at the marks still visible on his master's face, then he dropped his eyes to the ground.

"I am glad to see you back, sir!" he murmured. "Mr. Faversham is here. He has anticipated you by some three-quarters of an hour!"

Benny Beard was in the billiard-room, knocking the balls about. The dapper little man was wearing an uneasy, restless expression. He had heard of Scarsdale's re-capture, of Esther's illness, and the remorse that had been for so long gnawing at his heart-strings was gnawing yet more bitterly. Unprincipled scoundrel, thief, and perjurer he might be, but there was humanity somewhere in his composition. He loathed himself more than ever for his share in the business. He had tried to excuse himself. He had been dragged into it. Esther's white face and tearless eyes haunted him. He thought of her as she had been, all sympathy and tenderness, when she had tended him after his accident. What had she done that she should suffer thus?

"Heavens!" he muttered hoarsely, "and to think that I have had a hand in this! But I've done with the Marquis now—done with him for good. He can go his way; I'm going mine. God! but I've been a coward in the past, or I should have done this before now; but I'm going to do it now. I'm going to tell him so to his face!"

But he could not help a shudder. He was a moral coward. He dreaded breaking with this man who had been his master for so long. If he parted with the Marquis he might not be safe. The Marquis was unforgiving and vindictive. At the same time the Marquis had better be careful. They were both in the same boat.

Benny leant forward, played, missed and pocketed his own ball.

"If only that fellow Scarsdale were righted and that poor girl made happy, I should be able to sleep better at nights!"

But he was a coward. Yet he wondered if it would be possible, without incriminating himself.

When the door opened and Revelle entered, the expression on Benny's face was that of a guilty man. He did not look the former in the face as he shook hands. His words of greeting had a nervous ring.

"Had a good time, Benny?"

"Yes, Marquis, yes. And an innocent one. 'Pon my word! I think a quiet, innocent, respectable life suits me best. And you?"

Glancing at him shiftily he saw the traces of Scarsdale's handiwork on his face. Revelle winced.

"I say, Marquis, you ought to thank your stars that you came through that—that business at Gurlston Bay with your life!"

"I didn't send for you to talk over that," answered Revelle sharply. "I'm frightfully hard up. We must pull off the Normanhurst business at once. Fellows are howling for money. I'm in a desperate corner. We must pull it off this week!"

Benny Beard turned a little pale, and shifted his position nervously.

"Marquis," he stammered, "you'll excuse me, won't you, if I speak out; but I'm not having any this time. No—no more, thank you, if you don't very much mind!"

Revelle moved up to him deliberately, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

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Deafness and Catarrh.
212 Cases Cured.

The Semi-annual Report of the Drouet Institute lately published in the leading London daily papers gives a record of 212 cases of deafness, and ear, nose and throat diseases cured by the Drouet Method during the first six months of 1902. A brief analysis of these 212 cases shows results which are, to say the least, remarkable. Nearly one-half the patients before applying to the Institute had been under some form of treatment which had failed. There are numerous cases of deafness of 5, 10, 15, 20, and even 40 years duration in which restoration of hearing had been effected, and some of these patients had been "Stone Deaf." Then there are those astonishing cases, where deafness was cured at the age of 60, 65, 70, 75 and even 86 years. Again there are cases of sclerosis, or deafness from dry catarrh of the middle ear, pronounced incurable by many Aurists, which have yielded to the new treatment of the Drouet Institute, all of which give renewed hope to those who, after trying the older methods, have given up in despair. For those who suffer from catarrh of the nose and throat there are the histories of cures of cases of long standing in which the Drouet Method has been successful, even after operations and severe cauterizations of the nose and throat have failed.

Those who desire to read the complete details of the various cases can find very full descriptions in the latest number of the "Journal for the Deaf," a publication which is issued by the Institute as a means of assisting people who desire to gain a knowledge of the causes and the symptoms of deafness and diseases of the ear, nose and throat. Besides plain talks to the deaf, and to catarrhal sufferers, the "Journal" describes the method of treatment devised by Dr. Drouet, which consists chiefly of an external application placed on the prominent bony part of the skull just behind the ear. A free copy of the *Journal* with a "Supplement" containing an additional record of upwards of 40 cases cured during the past month, can be obtained by addressing the Secretary. Drouet Institute, 72, Regent's Park Road, Primrose Hill, London, N.W.

A special feature of the Drouet Institute is the Correspondence Department which enables patients who cannot come to London for a personal consultation, to receive advice and all instructions for carrying on the treatment at home. This is accomplished by means of a Pathological Report Form which allows patients to give explicitly the details of their ailment. In fact all but a few of the 212 cases reported cured had treatment conducted by correspondence. The Report Form is always enclosed free with each copy of the *Journal*, and the advice by correspondence, as well as the consultation by means of the Form, is also absolutely free.

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A FEW RECENT TESTIMONIALS.

Mr. H. R. Francis, Beaulieu House, Shandon Road, Clapham Park, S.W., writes (May 15th, 1902): "You will be pleased to hear that after taking your pills my complexion has become most beautiful and clear. Though I am not vain, I find it difficult to abstain from seeing myself in every mirror I come across. I trust you will be able to make your remedy known to all the thousands of sufferers from sallowness and skin blemishes."

Miss M. A. B., of Brixton Hill, S.W., writes (May 5th, 1902): "I have much pleasure in informing you that since I have begun to use David Macqueen's Pills, a great change has come over me. My health has greatly improved, and my complexion (so my friends tell me) is charming, thanks to your pills. I shall certainly recommend them to my friends. P.S.—You can make what use you like of this, with the exception of the full name and number in address."

Miss A. K., Railway Road, King's Lynn (June 28th, 1902), writes: "I am very pleased to say that after taking your pills my complexion and health have improved wonderfully."

Miss Bertha H., of Stroud Green, N., writes (May 8th, 1902): "Gentlemen, I write to thank you for the pills which have certainly proved most beneficial. I intend to recommend them to my friends."

Mr. A. Kay, Chadwell Heath, Essex, writes (May 2nd 1902): "I have been taking your pills for a short time only but really must say they have a wonderful effect on my health. They do not purge or act violently in any way, but gently and surely bring about a most healthy state. Apparent *outwardly* and inwardly felt."

Mrs. S. Wilson, St. Margaret's Terrace, Station Road, Bognor (May 15th, 1902): "I enclose 1/1½ for your pills which please forward to me as before. I think it only right to let you know that I am more than satisfied with the results, and think that every word in your advertisements is true; as my complexion and skin was a great annoyance to me, but after taking one box of your pills my skin is getting simply lovely which I can only attribute to your wonderful blood purifying pills. I feel, when out, bound to stop everyone I see with a bad skin and tell them of your great remedy."

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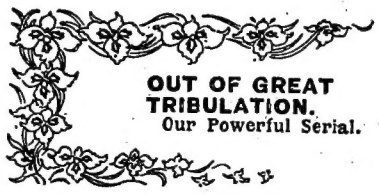

"Benny, don't talk rot! You're in this business with me!"

The words had been spoken masterfully.

"But it isn't rot this time. I've had enough of it!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Revelle, again.

"It's not nonsense. The last business has sickened me. You've sent that poor chap back to prison; that poor girl's been lying on the brink of death. I've had enough, more than enough, I tell you. We'll part friends, and all that, Marquis, but I'm hanged if I'll go another inch along the road with you. It's no use you trying to argue with me, I've made up my mind!"

Revelle's lips were twitching. A hard look was in his eyes.

"I shouldn't break with me, Benny, if I were you," he whispered, with just a suspicion of a hiss in his voice, "or——"

His hand tightened on Benny's shoulder. Then Benny broke away from him, a nervous, but rather unpleasant expression in his eyes.

"Don't threaten me, Marquis, or I might be tempted to do the same. We're both in the same boat. If there's any sinking, we'd both sink together."

Revelle changed colour. He had looked upon Benny as completely under his thumb. He had never dreamt that he was really capable of breaking with him. He gave a little laugh. His whole manner had changed.

"Well, well, Benny, we don't want to quarrel. It won't make any difference to—er—our friendship. I shall miss you awfully—more than I can say. We've worked splendidly together. Of course, I've still got Railton; but he's not the same; but at the same time if you've made up your mind, it's no use discussing the matter further. But you won't be in a hurry to go, will you? Stay on here as long as you like. Glad to have you for your own sake!"

"It's awfully good of you!"—Benny did not seem any more at ease in consequence of the Marquis' change of manner—"but I think I shall be getting back to town this evening!"

"Very well, old chap. Please yourself. You're your own master, of course. I suppose you will be staying on at your old quarters. I shall be giving you a look up one of these days."

"Well, I'm not quite sure. I may travel for a bit. I haven't quite made up my mind. I'll let you know when I've definitely decided!"

"Very well. Come on, I'll play you a couple of hundred up, and give you fifty, that's about fair!"

Revelle took a cue from the rack, and proceeded to chalk it unconcernedly; all the same he was gravely exercised in his mind about Benny's future intentions.

"I am," he said rather inconsequently, "one of those fellows—you play first, Benny—who never forget and never forgive a bad turn. And I've had awful good luck in the past. I've never yet failed to get even with anybody who's played me a dirty trick."

Benny played his ball into baulk. Revelle stepped up to the table, leant forward, and glanced along his cue.

"I believe if a fellow played me false, I shouldn't think twice; I'd wipe him out of existence, and take my chance of the scaffold!"

He played a beautiful stroke, running his ball in off the red.

Benny's next stroke resulted in a bad miss. Revelle followed with a break of twenty-five.

"Yes"—Revelle was chalking his cue again—"the man who sells me will be signing his death-warrant at the same time."

"Marquis," suddenly snarled Benny, very white about the lips, "what the dickens are you driving at? Are you getting at me? Do—do you think that I should—should ever round on you?"

Revelle laughed.

"My dear Benny, you're hyper-sensitive! You round on me!"

He laughed again. But the situation was a strained one.

It was the haunting memory of a beautiful white face, an indescribable look of sadness in the dark eyes, that caused Benny to make a bad hash of the easy position Revelle had left him.

"But I tell you what, Benny, though you won't stand in with me, you might be a good chap and lend me your tools!"

"With the greatest of pleasure possible, Marquis. I—I brought them along with me. I thought you might like them. You do understand me, don't you? This is absolutely a friendly dissolution of partnership!"

"Of course, dear old chap! I'm afraid that you're suffering from Railton's trouble—loss of nerve. Say no more about it!"

* * * * *

"Railton, let me have a look at those plans."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Faversham had taken his departure. Revelle was alone in the smoking-room. The silent valet drew some papers from his pocket—very carefully drawn up plans of The Towers, Lord Normanhurst's residence.

"I believe them, sir, to be quite accurate!"

He drew out another paper.

"This, sir, contains a time-table—if I may use the expression—of the policemen on night duty in this neighbourhood. I have to thank my two young constable friends for the facts scheduled there."

Revelle took it.

"This, Railton," he said after a comprehensive glance, "is simply admirable!"

Railton flushed a little, and bowed.

"And when, sir, if it is not an impertinent question, is it your intention to carry through this enterprise?"

"To-morrow night, single-handed. Mr. Faversham has resigned!"

"So I gathered, sir, from his rather sudden departure. I trust not in consequence of any friction?"

"Oh, no, we parted the best of friends!"

"Then to-morrow night, sir?"

"Yes, to-morrow night, Railton. Have you any suggestion?"

"Only this, sir, if you will pardon the liberty; would it not be as well—or perhaps you may deem it an excessive precaution—to be seriously indisposed to-morrow, confined to your bed, and let the fact be made known?"

Revelle nodded his head.

"You see, sir, in case of any unpleasantness arising, I should be able to testify to having attended you in the course of the night, the other servants being able to vouch for the same!"

"Yes, that sounds all right, Railton! Influenza to-morrow, then, let it be!"

(To be continued.)

First Woman: "I got a letter from you yesterday; but do you know it is dated next Wednesday week?" Second woman: "Good gracious! John must have posted it the very day I gave it to him."

Mrs. Strongmind: "Why don't you go to work?" Tramp: "Please, mum, I made a solemn vow twenty years ago that I'd never do another stroke of work till women was paid the same wages as men."

Mrs. Hansom: "I understand, sir, that you have secretly been making love to my daughter, and I must forbid an acquaintance begun in that way. You should have seen me first." Shrewd Suitor: "Madame, had I seen you first I should have forgotten your daughter and fallen in love with you." Mrs. Hansom: "Um—the informality of the proceeding was all I objected to. Come with me and I will introduce you to my husband."

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Cut Discourteous.

"F. K. B." made the acquaintance of a gentleman three years ago, and he used to pay her great attention. One day she thought he seemed rather cool, so the next time she met him she did not care to recognise him. She heard that he afterwards wondered why. She since thinks she has made a mistake. She likes him very much and would wish to be friends. Whose place is it to speak first?

* * * *

Evidently "F. K. B." has been in the wrong. However cool he may have been on the occasion in question, as she knew him socially, by cutting him she commits an offence, the penalty of which is the cessation of an acquaintance. His coolness may, for all she knows, have been caused by private worry or indisposition, and have had nothing to do with his feelings towards her. Why not take the opportunity next time she meets him of giving him a very nice bow, and if she gets a chance of speaking, tell him that she was afraid she had omitted to notice him the other day, "thinking at the time he was someone else," or some excuse of the kind. The man could scarcely be expected to take the initiative after her treatment of him.

❦❦❦

The Cure for Ugliness.

"CAN one make oneself less ugly?" asks "STELLA," who confesses to being one of the plainest girls imaginable. "If you can recommend me any way by which I can improve my looks I shall be very much gratified."

* * * *

The surest way "STELLA" can improve her looks is to look after her personal character. Whoever knew people uncharitable enough to ridicule anyone's ugliness if they saw in it signs of a kind nature and generally attractive disposition? On the contrary, people altogether forget one's looks in one's character. Does not beauty grow hateful to those who contemplate it if it does not cover a nice character? Let "STELLA" altogether forget her looks and cultivate accomplishments, say singing, playing the piano, painting, fancy work, or a knowledge of useful books; let her do good actions whenever she can, and before many years her ugliness will have worn off entirely, as surely as the beauty of her friends does, and give place instead to the good looks of a good heart.

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Should Girls go to Cafés?

"ADA" went with some girl friends the other night rather late to a West-end café, and while there was seen by a gentleman friend, who expressed his great surprise at seeing her at such a place. "ADA" maintained that there was nothing wrong in her conduct, and had rather a tiff with the man. However, she is prepared to abide by my judgment in the matter. Ought she to have gone there?

* * * *

There is nothing particularly wrong about it. On the Continent women of all classes go to cafés. But it is not so in England, where they are often not desirable places for girls of respectable parents. I should not like to see a girl friend of mine at such a place. There is, I repeat, nothing wrong, but a girl by going to places of this kind associates herself with an undesirable class and really derives no good from such visits. Of course a girl, escorted by her *fiancé*, or say her brother might go to such places, but certainly not with other gir friends.

❦❦❦

The Shady Suitor.

MANY years ago Peter was a suitor for the hand of "ANNA H.," but just as things seemed to have been brought to a happy climax, something went wrong with him in business, and discreditable stories got about in connection with him. Of course "ANNA H." was compelled for the time being to break off the engagement, partly because Peter had not a penny to bless himself with. What was the truth of the stories against Peter, "ANNA H." never knew, but since this he has succeeded in placing himself in a splendid position, and has again applied for her hand. Do I think she should accept him, and if so, would her parents be likely to consent?

* * * *

What sort of a position has Peter now got into? Is it a responsible post in a really good undertaking? If so, I think "ANNA H." might safely reinstate him into her affections, and I cannot see that her parents need object to again receiving him as their prospective son-in-law. But "ANNA H." should be sure as to Peter's position. I have known young men of doubtful reputation who have announced that they were receiving munificent salaries as secretaries of companies, and at the end of three months have found themselves within an ace of the police-court as conspirators for fraud—the willing tools of bogus company promoters. Get a friend, "ANNA H.," to make a few inquiries as to Peter's position before you again take him in hand as a suitor.

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The Happy Heiress Hunter.

"SHOULD a man look for a wife with money?" "JONAH" is a young man in a modest position, but believes that if he met a girl with money he could place himself independently in highly affluent circumstances. Having to work for the necessaries of life prevents his carrying out certain schemes he has in mind, and he thinks that if his household were secure he could really do great things in the world. Do I, therefore, think he would be justified in seeking a girl for her wealth alone?

* * * *

If "JONAH" thinks he can find a girl with wealth who is disposed to give herself and her fortune into his tender keeping I should certainly advise him to seek for her. Columbus sought for America, and many men are at present seeking for the North and South Poles. I do not discourage marriages for wealth, if they come off, provided always that the man is man enough not to expect to live on his wife's means, but is prepared to work at a profession. Such marriages have, in many cases, paved the way for men with brains but no money, and provided there is a certain amount of proper marital affection between the parties, these matches often result quite happily. So, "JONAH," don't bother about the ethics of the matter if you really think you can find that girl.

❦❦❦

Etiquette for Mistresses.

"HETTIE" is a servant girl, and the other day her sister called. While she was there, her mistress entered the kitchen and appeared to be in a very amiable mood. "HETTIE" introduced her sister, who did not know how to act in the presence of the mistress. Can I tell her what would be the proper etiquette under the circumstances?

* * * *

The etiquette should be decided by the mistress. Of course it would not be usual for her to shake hands with a social inferior, so she would probably have bowed a "how d'you do," and entered into a general conversation. "HETTIE'S" sister would reply "Quite well, thank you," or something of the kind. In introducing anyone to a lady in such a position, the lady herself is expected to make the first acknowledgment, and all tactful people of good breeding would know how to save embarrassment to those introduced to them in a way which would at once facilitate conversation.

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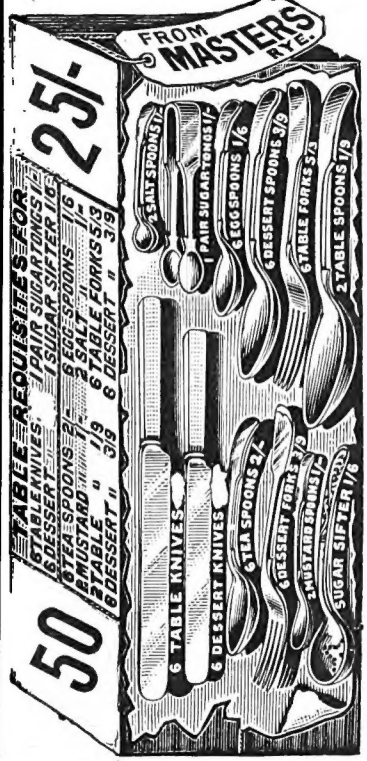

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